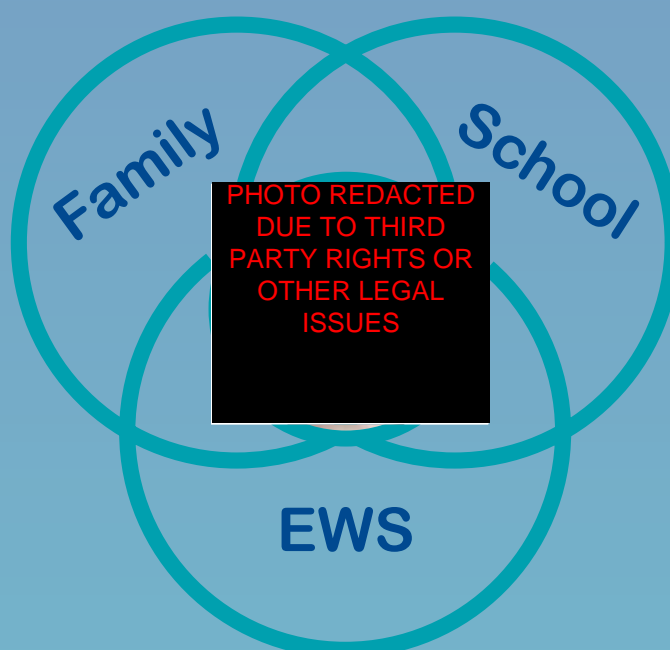




Report of a Survey of the

Education Welfare Service in Northern Ireland



Inspected: April/May 2002

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The legislative and policy context within which the Education Welfare Service (EWS) operates has changed significantly in the past five years. Most notable among the changes is the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which came into effect on the 4 November 1996. The Order is the most comprehensive piece of legislation and the most distinctive reform of law in Northern Ireland in relation to children to be effected in recent years. It has major implications for the work of the EWS in terms of the care and protection of children and in the promotion of conditions conducive to educational progress in schools. The publication of "Promoting and Sustaining Good Behaviour: a Discipline Strategy for Schools" (DENI, 1998) recommended the inspection of the EWS. This survey discharges the duty placed on the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) to report on the work of the EWS.
- 1.2 During April and May 2002, a team of seven inspectors undertook the survey of the Education and Library Boards' (ELBs) EWS in Northern Ireland. In the nine months prior to the survey, consultation meetings were held with the Chief Education Welfare Officers (CEWOs) during which the structure, format and protocols for the survey were discussed and agreed. Further meetings were held with the Senior Educational Welfare Officers (SEWOs) and the Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) in each ELB.
- 1.3 A member of the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) joined the inspection team at the request of the Chief Inspector, ETI, as a consequence of a request from the five CEWOs, and undertook to report on the quality of provision for "Looked After Children" (LAC) across the five ELB areas.
- 1.4 As part of ETI's pilot arrangements for involving associate assessors in inspections, three experienced principal teachers received training to assist them in supporting the work of the survey and were involved in surveying parents' and schools' perceptions of, and attitudes to, the EWS.
- 1.5 The focus of the survey was the work of the EWS: the main aims were:
 - i. to evaluate and report on the impact of the EWS on the education system;
 - ii. to promote improvement.

- 1.6 The table below details staffing levels of each ELB's EWS, and indicates that some 171 EWOs are employed across Northern Ireland.

Education and Library Board	Staffing levels at June 2002
North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB)	CEWO +5 SEWOs +25 EWOs + 3 Teachers
Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB)	CEWO +6 SEWOs +26 EWOs +3 Youth Workers
South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB)	CEWO +6 SEWOs +34 EWOs
Southern Education and Library Board (SELB)	CEWO +4 SEWOs +27 EWOs
Western Education and Library Board (WELB)	CEWO +6 SEWOs +27 EWOs
All Boards	5 CEWOs + 27 SEWOs +139 EWOs
	TOTAL: 171

- 1.7 The process of evaluation involved the survey team in taking into account:

- the outcomes of meetings with the CEWOs;
- the EWS documentation;
- the views expressed by EWS staff;
- the organisation, management and administration of the service;
- the views of a sample of schools/parents;
- the working practices of the EWS;

- the EWS professional development/induction programmes;
- EWS projects;
- LAC provision;
- accommodation and resources.

1.8 The survey findings are based on the evidence of:

- work shadowing of EWOs;
- observations of meetings, projects, school and home visits;
- interviews with parents, principals and relevant members of education, health and social services staff;
- discussions with relevant staff of support agencies;
- discussions with a small sample of children and young people;
- a scrutiny of documentation including service level agreements, records related to supervision, staff meetings and administration, as well as individual samples of planners and timetables;
- attendance at a variety of meetings;
- visits to EWS accommodation;
- a review of resources used by the service.

1.9 Individual reports, including a separate LAC section prepared by the SSI, were completed in respect of the EWS of the five ELBs, and the findings discussed and disseminated at meetings with the CEWO and senior managers of each ELB.

1.10 The survey findings are presented as the first Northern Ireland report on the overall quality of the EWS service; the report includes a summary of the main findings reflecting the features of good practice and the common issues across the ELBs.

2. **Summary of the Main Findings in the Five Education and Library Boards**

2.1 There are appropriate structures in place to secure the effective provision of EWS across the ELBs. The service promotes well the aims and objectives set out in the various policy and guidance documents and materials and evidenced by the good relationships and mutual respect established among the service, the vast majority of schools, the parents and their children. Overall, the survey found evidence of significant strengths in the service, in particular, the high standards achieved by the EWOs in their professional attitude and commitment to the educational welfare of the pupils whom the service supports.

- 2.2 Much has been achieved over the past few years in raising the professional profile of the service and in developing the range and the quality of the services provided. While variation in practice exists across the ELBs, there is a general view among schools and parents that the service is providing a much valued and increasingly diverse support to schools and pupils.
- 2.3 The CEWOs meet regularly to share information and to discuss issues of common interest. The group is currently considering the development of common referral systems across the ELBs. The CEWO forum has the potential to promote a strategic direction for the EWS on a regional basis, to further the dissemination of good EWS practice, to achieve consistency and cohesion in EWS policies and procedures across Northern Ireland.
- 2.4 One of the main findings of the survey relates to the expanding role of the EWS and the trend towards developing more preventative approaches to its work, particularly within the primary school sector. The survey findings endorse this development as worthwhile as it enables school-based problems to be addressed in a more timely manner. The survey, in addition, indicates the need for the ELBs to review EWS staffing levels to ensure that the shift of emphasis to the primary school sector and to project work does not leave provision at the post-primary sector inadequately supported.
- 2.5 The survey acknowledges the positive ethos of the service across the ELBs and the strong professional commitment and range of skills of the EWOs. The schools and parents, who were contacted as part of the survey, value the service, and it is evident that the needs of individual pupils are given a high level of attention at all times. In the majority of sessions observed, the inter-personal skills of individual EWOs were of a high calibre. As a consequence, many of the pupils benefited from the relationship established with individual EWOs and were encouraged to improve their attendance or to re-engage with schools.
- 2.6 The CEWOs provide strong and caring leadership; they support well the SEWOs and the EWOs and promote successfully a common sense of purpose throughout the service. The hard work of all staff is evident, and underpins all that the services seek to achieve in securing the educational attendance of the children. Routines are well established and internal communication is generally good. A sense of teamwork is evident across the EWS, and individual EWOs carry out their duties with due care for, and sensitivity to, the individual needs of the children under their care.
- 2.7 There are helpful policy guidance materials, which provide useful information for the EWS staff, and good support is available when sensitive or difficult situations are encountered. Well-presented information leaflets are available to schools to help them introduce the EWS to both parents and school staff. In the best practice, the EWOs attend open evenings and annual parents meetings in order to encourage parents to be aware of the contribution the EWS makes to the

work of the school. An evaluation of the various materials and information documents indicates that the EWS would benefit from the development and promotion of a five ELB approach to encourage a regional direction for EWS provision and, in particular, to address child protection functions within the role of the EWS.

- 2.8 An analysis of parental responses following meetings with the associate assessors suggested that the vast majority of the parents believed that their children benefited from the support of the EWS. A small minority of parents felt, however, that more could be done to protect children at school from bullying. The acquisition of an Education Supervision Order (ESO) was identified as a necessary step for a small number of individual children whom the parents and the schools found difficult to motivate and engage in education. The survey findings indicate that the recommendations of the Unicorn report¹, commissioned by the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB), should be considered at a five ELB level as a basis upon which the use of ESOs can be more effective. One of the main conclusions of the analysis of the parental responses was the recognition that individual EWOs were positive advocates for the families, and an important source of contact between family and school. A common theme emerging from the discussions with the parents was the consistent view of the service as a difficult job, which was carried out in a professional and sensitive manner.
- 2.9 The evidence from the schools visited by the associate assessors and the Inspectorate, revealed a high level of support and regard for the EWS. Among the positive comments expressed was the view that a majority of schools had good working relationships with the EWS and were positive about the enhanced role and developments the service was currently pursuing. However, a minority of schools retain a narrow view of the work of the EWS and convey this to parents and pupils. All schools reported a satisfactory response time from the EWS to requests for intervention or support, and report that they have made effective use of the information provided by EWOs following home visits and parental discussions. The survey findings generally support the parents' views and the schools' judgments, and identify the need for the service to consider further how best to raise awareness about the emerging and developing role of the service with schools and parents.

¹ *Education Supervision Project Report (Unicorn Consultancy & BELB EWS 2000)*

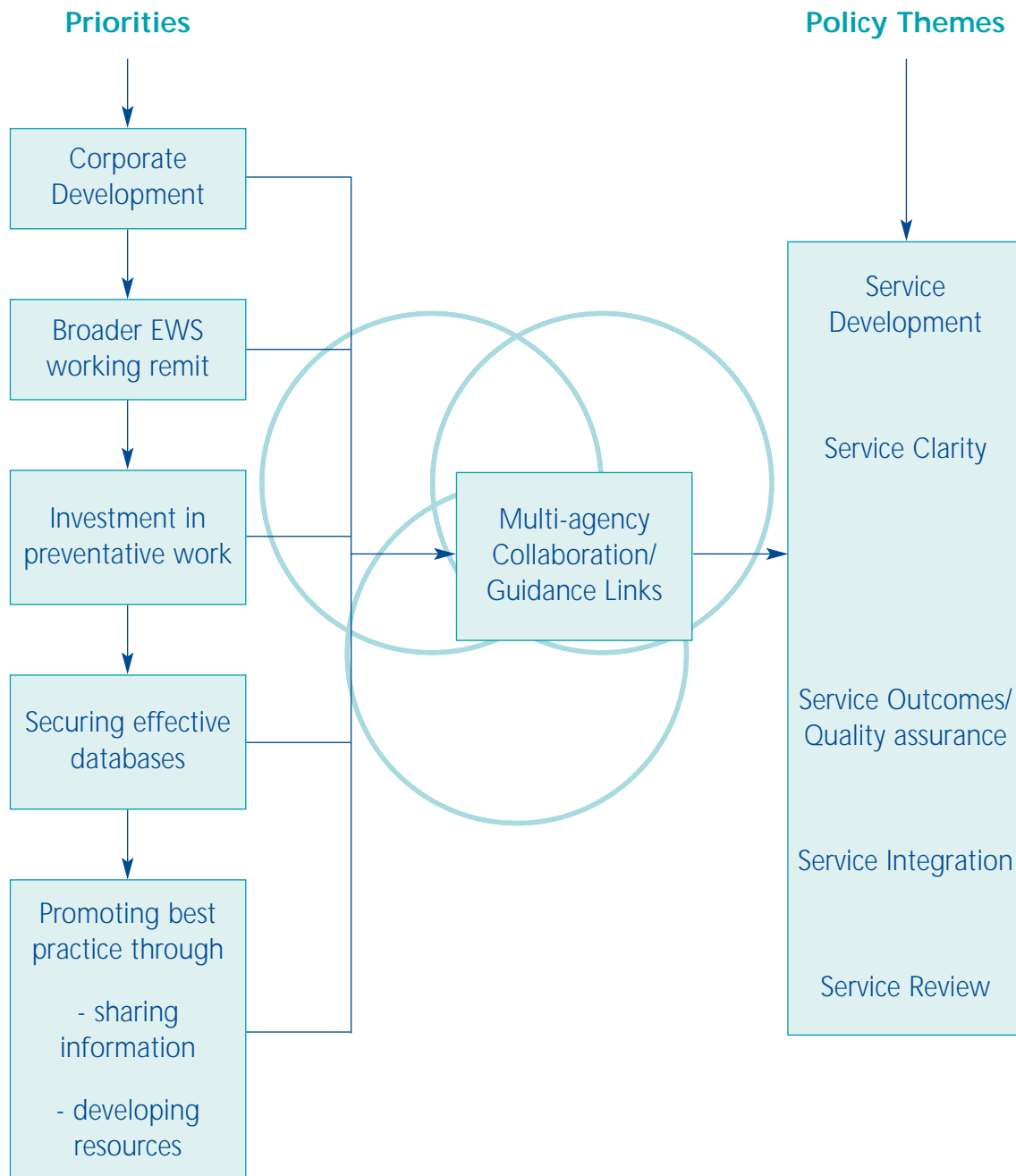
- 2.10 The survey team found a small number of EWOs, without adequate group work or classroom management training, working with pupils in schools. In these situations, the teachers were not sufficiently involved in the development of the programmes, or in following up the issues discussed. As a consequence, the activities were less effective than intended. This example underlines the need for some schools to ensure that the contribution of the EWS is viewed as an integral aspect of, and an extension to, the schools' discharge of their pastoral care and child protection responsibilities.
- 2.11 While the survey team found examples of good co-operative practices between ELBs and Health and Social Services (HSS) Boards and Trusts, the absence of formal mechanisms for routine information sharing and of joint protocols to inform practice means that cross-departmental work is progressing at different rates across Northern Ireland.
- 2.12 In particular, the survey found that schools are generally not made aware either when a child becomes looked after by a HSS Trust or of the particular needs of individual children who are looked after, as this information is not provided routinely to the CEWOs or the schools. In only one area, where the CEWO has responsibility for children who are looked after, did a HSS Trust provide information when a child became or ceased to be looked after. The absence of information in respect of looked after children means that CEWOs are not in a position to provide dedicated services to support:
- schools which have enrolled children who are looked after;
 - the looked after children who are experiencing school-based problems.
- It also means that the CEWOs are unable to provide information on whether children who are looked after are over-represented in terms of suspensions or expulsions from school or among children attending alternative educational provision. The co-ordination of the work of the EWS and the HSS Trusts to promote the educational attainments and care of children who are looked after needs further improvement.
- 2.13 Currently, the EWS lacks an effective means of collating information on pupils' attendance and the outcomes of intervention. The poor level of information and communication technology (ICT) resource is a major issue which the ELBs should prioritise for attention.
- 2.14 The EWS regard the training and induction of staff as a key priority. Training opportunities are well planned within each of the ELBs and much work is done to ensure that newly appointed EWOs are inducted effectively into the educational system. The survey identifies this area as one where joint in-service and induction training could be developed across the five ELBs to reduce duplication of effort and to promote shared expertise and cohesive practice.

The EWS is predominantly staffed by qualified social workers, as a social work qualification is a requirement for the position of EWO. The move to achieve a professionally qualified workforce has clearly raised the profile and status of the service and strengthened the social work aspect of the EWOs' role. However, the current social work training course does not currently include an educational focus. This issue is being followed up by one of the CEWOs representing the EWS on a working party on the review of the social work qualifications. The survey team considers that the introduction of an educational module to the social work course would support more effectively EWOs on entry to the profession and lead to a shared view among social workers and the EWOs of the necessary linkage between education and social functioning in the community. In addition, the survey team considers it is timely to review the name of the service to help signify its developing role and broader remit.

2.16 In conclusion, the survey team recommends the following as five critical areas of policy and practice which should be pursued in order to address effectively the issues raised by this survey:

1. the development of guidance and procedures for the EWS at a Northern Ireland level, involving Department of Education (DE), Department of Health and Social Services, HSS Boards and Trusts and the ELBs, to address the complex problems associated with school attendance, social inclusion and child protection, and the sharing of information between HSS Trusts and the EWS;
2. the sharing and dissemination of good practice across the ELBs, and the clarification and further promotion of developing service provision, eg preventative services, services for looked after children and traveller children;
3. the need to raise the awareness among schools and parents of the role of the EWS including the development of its services through project work and preventative approaches to working with children and their families;
4. the establishment of databases and ICT support to improve the efficient discharge of the service and to inform future planning and monitoring arrangements;
5. the need to develop a more effective approach to the use of Education Supervision Orders (ESO) and to improve the resources to facilitate the EWS to implement, more effectively, its responsibility in respect of discharging duties associated with ESOs.

In summary, the survey identifies a number of strategic priorities and emerging themes to underpin the future development of the EWS in Northern Ireland. These are illustrated below.



A Report of a Survey of the Education Welfare Service in The Belfast Education and Library Board

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Belfast Education and Library Board's (BELB) Education Welfare Service responds to referrals from schools, parents and other agencies with regard to attendance, suspension/expulsion and to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that are impinging upon a pupil's right to full-time education. The EWS is placed within the BELB's 'Pupil Services' Department under the management of an Assistant Senior Education Officer.

2. Management of The Service

- 2.1 The EWS is managed by the Chief Education Welfare Officer (CEWO) supported by six Senior Education Welfare Officers (SEWOs), three of whom have responsibility for area teams covering all schools within the BELB, and one of whom is responsible for the team supporting special schools, while another is part of the Behaviour Support Team. A further SEWO is the BELB's Courts Officer with responsibility for the service's information systems. Data supplied by the EWS shows the following information:

- number of cases referred to the EWS in 2000/2001 - 1812;
- number of cases closed successfully - 707;
- number closed due to pupils reaching school leaving age - 128.

- 2.2 The EWS has a complement of 26 officers and, at the time of the survey, there were six vacancies which were inhibiting, to some degree, the work of the service. The service is split into teams, the South and East Team, the West Team, the North Team and the Special Education Team.

- 2.3 Also employed, as part of the EWS, are two Education Youth Workers (EYWs) who support the service by working in schools with groups of pupils from the primary and post-primary sectors. However, the EYWs are not managed appropriately and are free to set much of their own agenda. When they were appointed, the specification for the role of the EYWs was to forge links between the school and youth sectors so that the EWS could assist with the development of joint programmes between schools and the youth sector. In practice, the EYWs do largely the same in-school work as the EWOs and, in some cases, provide similar training as the educational psychology service, such as anger management courses with individual children. The survey findings indicate the need to identify a line management structure for the EYWs based on a specifically defined job description.

2.4 The person with the overall responsibility for managing the service is the CEWO. She has been in post for the last year and, in that time, has been proactive and effective in initiating many management changes to the way the service operates. Chief among these has been the production of the EWS business plan, guidance for schools on Service Level Agreements, and the development of an induction programme for newly appointed staff. Along with the CEWOs from the other ELBs, she has been involved in the Education Welfare Service Working Party, set up in July 2001, to identify a number of strategic and developmental goals for the service. One of her main responsibilities is to act as the BELB's designated officer for child protection. An illustration of the amount of time allocated to the designated child protection duties can be noted from the following record of activities from September 2001 until May 2002:

- 247 enquiry child protection referrals between schools and BELB officers;
- 50 child protection referrals to Social Services;
- ten police investigations against BELB employees;
- regular commitment to provide training for newly designated and deputy designated teachers.

In the last year, the EWS has provided child protection training for:

- drivers and bus escorts;
- classroom assistants;
- staff who provide Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS) and education in special schools;
- caretakers and ancillary staff in schools;
- BELB officers, for example, Educational Psychologists and Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) staff.

These duties take up a significant amount of the CEWO's time and detract from other management duties. The BELB is aware of the problem and has agreed to appoint a Deputy Chief Education Welfare Officer to assist the CEWO with the management of responsibilities in respect of child protection and pastoral care. This survey fully endorses the BELB's decision.

2.5 One of the SEWOs in the BELB has responsibility for managing the EWS's involvement in court proceedings for those pupils whose attendance has failed to respond to earlier interventions. The SEWO is also responsible for the BELB's integrated database, which collates and stores appropriate details of pupils'

attendance records, and for issuing licences to firms employing children under sixteen years of age including children participating in broadcasting and theatre company events. The extent of the latter work is shown below:

i. Employment Permits Issued by the BELB:

1/9/1998 - 31/8/1999 = 55

1/9/1999 - 31/8/2000 = 13

1/9/2000 - 31/8/2001 = 20

The EWS recognises that there is a considerable number of children of compulsory school age in the BELB area who are working part-time in some form of employment. The figures above show that a very small percentage of the children are licensed by the BELB as required by The Employment of Children Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996.

In this circumstance, a number of issues give cause for concern, including:

- the lack of formal arrangements to monitor the number of hours that children work;
- the lack of formal protocols to monitor the type of employment, which raises health and safety questions about the type of work children may be doing;
- the anecdotal evidence, from the EWS and schools, of children coming to school too tired to study or not coming to school at all;
- the lack of monitoring arrangements in respect of child protection;
- the possible exploitation of children.

ii. Performance Licences Issued:

1/9/1998 - 31/8/1999 = 41

1/9/1999 - 31/8/2000 = 82

1/9/2000 - 31/8/2001 = 157

It is clear from the figures above that more licences are being issued each year to broadcasting and theatre companies for radio, television and film productions. The SEWO believes that since children are required in law to be licensed, Children Public Performances Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996, this places a duty on the BELB to ensure the children's safety in terms of appropriate facilities such as changing and toileting, and the suitability of the productions. Current staffing levels do not ensure that this responsibility is carried out as the law intended. The survey team is concerned at these findings; there is a need for additional staff to inspect and monitor the implications of employment of young

children in the entertainment business. There is a crucial need to inform more effectively parents, children and employers of the legislation on child employment and of the responsibilities of organisations to comply with such regulations as are pertinent.

- 2.6 The EWO with responsibility for traveller children took up post in November 2001 and dedicates her time to supporting approximately 40 traveller children who attend three schools in particular; St Mary's Primary School, St Rose's High School and Corpus Christi College, Belfast. The children enrolled in these schools travel daily from homes/sites in the North-Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) and the South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) districts. The EWO has set up structures to liaise regularly with the relevant EWOs in these areas to help ensure effective support for the children, their families and the schools. The work of the EWO for travellers is of a high quality and valued by the traveller parents and schools alike. In the short period of time since her appointment, she has developed purposeful links with other statutory agencies, the (CASS) Officer for travellers and with non-statutory bodies such as Belfast Travellers' Support Group. She has also established an effective reward scheme for children who improve their attendance. The outcomes of her developing work are positive. It is notable that the attendance of most of the traveller children is improving and the schools report an improvement in their behaviour. Clear lines of communication between traveller parents and the schools are now in place and include a focus on the specific educational needs and experiences of the children, particularly at the time of transition from primary to post-primary education.
- 2.7 The SEWOs manage the work of the area teams effectively. They have a sound working knowledge of the areas in which they work and have established good relationships with the schools and the other statutory agencies concerned with the welfare of children. In the past year in particular, social unrest in a number of areas within the BELB has placed great pressure on the EWS and it is to the credit of the personnel involved, that they have remained focused on the core business of the service. Much has been done, in difficult circumstances, to offer programmes which seek to involve children in resolving problems of attendance, behaviour, anger management and conflict resolution and in learning to cope with interface situations. Examples of good practice noted in schools such as Mount Gilbert Community College, Corpus Christi College, Edenbrook Primary School and St Aidan's Primary School are illustrative of the good quality work which is helping to make a difference to the lives of children and their families in interface areas and areas of great social need.
- 2.8 There are many examples of the EWS forging successful and effective links with other external agencies with an interest in the welfare of children. A prime example is The Education Care and Health Forum which is a multi-agency partnership initiated by the North and West Belfast HSST, the South and East

Belfast HSST and the BELB to develop a range of services to promote the health, well-being and education of school-age children.

- 2.9 It is evident, from observation and attendance at a number of meetings, that much work remains to be done to develop a more cohesive and effective partnership within the BELB services such as educational psychology and CASS. This need was illustrated clearly in one example where the BELB's Parent Support Officer delivered a presentation to the CEWO and the SEWOs at a meeting in a Teachers' Centre, and afterwards gave the same presentation to the BELB's psychology service meeting in the same building.

3. **Ethos**

- 3.1 All of the sessions observed were characterised by the excellent quality of the relationships between the EWOs and the schools, parents and children. The officers have worked hard to develop positive working relationships and have established clear procedures for carrying out their duties. A number of factors contribute to the sound quality of the ethos noted. These include:

- clear guidance on working practices which provide consistency in the EWOs' links with schools and parents;
- effective working relationships with other professionals outside education;
- sound knowledge of the social environment of the schools and an empathy with the living conditions of many of their client families;
- the establishment of a genuine rapport with many of the homes that the EWOs visit;
- the EWOs' willingness to listen to and understand the problems faced by families;
- the establishment of a sound partnership with the schools they serve.

- 3.2 The EWOs have worked assiduously to create awareness among parents about the role and responsibilities of the service and have produced a series of information booklets on issues ranging from suspension from school, to child protection and to the requirements under the law for working children. While the development of an information service for parents and families is largely successful in mediating the EWS message about the range of its services, it is also evident a number of schools retain an out-dated and/or misconceived view of the work of the EWS; inappropriately, a few use an EWO home visit as a threat to induce parents to comply with the attendance regulations. The EWS should take more responsibility for mediating to parents its own message and working philosophy.

4. School/Parental Satisfaction Outcomes

4.1 The meeting with parents was attended by an associate assessor. The main points raised were as follows:

- the EWS staff were regarded as valued professionals doing what parents saw as a thankless job in very difficult circumstances;
- the parents accessed the service mostly through the schools; some referrals came from social services or friends;
- the parents felt that the EWS was not given sufficient publicity by the BELB or the schools;
- the length of time between referral and initial contact was immediate and welcomed;
- the EWOs actively encouraged young people to express their views and opinions in managing their own behaviours;
- the parents felt that the EWS valued them as parents;
- the parents held the impression that there was conflict between the EWS and the schools and they felt in many cases the schools did not listen to the EWO's advice;
- home visits carried out by the service were deemed to be useful, concerns were answered, and individual EWOs were accepted as friendly;
- all appointments made by EWOs were kept and most were on time.

4.2 The school satisfaction survey was also carried out by the associate assessor who visited eight schools. The main findings were as follows:

- the EWS is highly regarded by the schools;
- individual EWOs are seen as positive members of the school team;
- individual EWOs are regarded, in many instances, as pupil advocates who are independent of the school;
- the EWO plays a critical role in allaying the fears of parents;
- a very high level of collaboration exists between the schools and the EWS as demonstrated at weekly meetings, transfer of information, shared case plans etc;
- the main aspects of involvement by EWOs include behavioural support, attendance follow-up, securing transport, developing parental links and dealing with anger management;

- the EWS documentation was considered “user friendly” and clear;
- schools considered that the EWS responded quickly to their requests;
- the schools regarded the recent changes in EWS as having a positive impact on their efforts to engage pupils;
- the schools indicated that the EWS provided a useful collaborative and cohesive link with the other statutory agencies.

5. **Working Practices of The Education Welfare Officers**

- 5.1 The working practices of the EWS have been influenced greatly by the effect of the Children (NI) Order 1995 which became law in November 1996. Core work in schools is complemented by EWO involvement in a range of projects and schemes operating both in and across schools. Core visits to homes and schools, on attendance matters, are made as required, and are regarded as the baseline of the service support to schools. Individual EWOs carry out their core business with diligence and commitment.
- 5.2 Some of the work involves the EWS in developing attendance policies with schools. On a visit to Hazelwood Integrated College, there was substantial evidence of excellent relationships and on-going liaison between the school and the EWS to develop a whole-school approach to encouraging maximum attendance. Increasingly, policy planning with schools through Service Level Agreements are proving successful in establishing a function for the EWS within an overall school strategy to engage children positively in their schools. This is a helpful approach and has further potential.

6. **Professional Development/Induction Programme**

- 6.1 The induction programme for newly appointed EWOs has just been devised and is not yet in use. However, interviews with recently appointed EWOs, about the shadowing process involved during induction, showed how new staff members have the opportunity to work alongside more experienced colleagues; however, the EWOs acknowledged that there were many aspects of the work where no shadowing existed.
- 6.2 All EWOs undertake a programme of professional development and there are regular opportunities for staff to participate in courses relevant to their work.
- 6.3 The Education Supervision Project Report (2000) identified key areas for evaluation including the need to specify if ESOs are effective, under what conditions they work well, and what age groups were most likely to respond

positively to ESOs. While recognising the impact of ESOs on practice within the EWS, the report highlights a number of areas for action which will influence the future role of the EWS in managing ESOs. These areas for action include:

- the awareness raising of the function of ESOs and the role of BELB and EWS in relation to the role of social services and other relevant agencies;
- the development of an explanatory leaflet on ESOs for young people and their parents;
- the development of a parents' group to enhance and encourage parental responsibility;
- the further provision of group work for young people as an integral part of an EWS overall strategy;
- the continuation of applications for ESOs at an early stage of a child's school career to avoid school non-attendance becoming entrenched.

7. Involvement with Projects, Programmes and Partnership Committees

7.1 The EWS has an active and wide-ranging involvement with project work which contributes well to the service's preventative approach to much of its work. Projects observed which were appropriate and of a good standard, include the following:

1. The Education Youth Work Partnership project which aims to provide individual services to 60 young people per annum and to provide a range of group work programmes in collaboration with other services. In the year 2000/2001, 26 groups were facilitated catering for approximately 400 pupils.
2. The Juvenile Liaison Bureau project, which involves a range of personnel from the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI), Social Services, South and East Children's Panel, EWOs from BELB and SEELB and Whitefield House. The Bureau is effective in diverting children from the Juvenile Justice System through a very focused and sound exchange of information. The project is an excellent example of multi-disciplinary working in the interests of children.
3. The School Liaison Group (SLG) which provides a forum within schools where different agencies, such as the EWO, the social work co-ordinator

for education, the school nurse, and the designated teacher, can come together to share experiences and expertise and agree common action. The SLG's foci for intervention are as follows:

- the educational needs of LAC;
- children out of school (absences and excluded pupils);
- children who are ill;
- general support for children at risk ie those encountering social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The survey found that the work of the SLG is particularly successful in meeting its stated aims.

4. The Social Skills Project was an excellent exemplar of practice, in which the EWO and a teacher from the Link Centre collaborated with a post-primary school to raise the attendance level of a year nine class in which difficulties of behaviour and attendance had been encountered. The evidence at the end of the year's pilot was that the intervention had been successful in raising levels of attendance and educational performance.
5. The Pathways Referral Meeting, attended by school principals, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and other relevant staff from participating schools, was successfully aimed at identifying pupils at risk and agreeing a course of action for the purposeful engagement of pupils in the Pathways course.

8. **Accommodation and Resources**

- 8.1 Accommodation for EWOs in the area offices is adequate; officers can work in privacy when interviewing parents, teachers and pupils. In the BELB's headquarters, the accommodation is entirely unsuitable for the CEWO and the senior EWO who are located there. The CEWO, with her responsibility for child protection, requires an area which provides confidentiality and privacy to carry out her duties. This matter should be dealt with as a matter of urgency by the BELB.
- 8.2 Information and communication technology (ICT) provision for the EWS in the BELB is inadequate given the EWS's need to access electronically stored data, input new data and update files and access e-mail and the Internet. On health and safety grounds there is a need to consider some form of personal communication system to enable officers to keep in touch with their base, particularly given their duties in areas of social unrest.

9. Conclusion

9.1 The BELB's EWS has successfully negotiated a period of change in the management of the service. The many difficulties caused by the social unrest have been handled with sensitivity and determination, and the range of services has expanded to meet the developing role of the EWS. This survey has noted many strengths in the service including:

- the dedication and commitment of the CEWO and the SEWOs in managing the work through difficult times;
- the sound relationships with parents, schools and the pupils;
- the innovative and imaginative approaches developed to address problems with pupils' attendance;
- the successful links forged with external agencies and the high quality of the information booklets on services for parents, children and schools.

A number of areas for improvement have been identified. These relate to the need to:

- establish effective arrangements to promote team work within the ELB's various services in order to share and clarify working practices and avoid unnecessary overlap of work;
- introduce an appropriate line management arrangement to support the development of the role of the EYWs;
- address the undue amount of time the CEWO spends on child protection issues;
- market more effectively the EWS service;
- address the accommodation difficulties faced by the CEWO in the BELB's HQ;
- improve the ICT and communication resources of the EWS.

Given the commitment of staff and management of the EWS, these issues can be addressed with confidence.

The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) – The Role of The Education Welfare Service (EWS) in Relation to The Education of Looked After Children

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The term “looked after children” refers to children who are cared for by a HSS Trust either under the terms of a Care Order, or accommodated under a voluntary agreement between the parents, or others with parental responsibility, and a HSS Trust. Research in recent years has found that in terms of educational attainment, looked after children do less well than other children, even those from comparable social, economic and family backgrounds. The Health Committee Report, “Children Looked After by Local Authorities” (House of Commons 1998, London: The Stationery Office), noted (Para 46) that:
- between 50% and 75% of school leavers who have been in care (care leavers) complete their schooling with no formal qualifications compared with only 6% of the general population;
 - between 12% and 19% of care leavers go on to further education compared with 68% of the general population;
 - between 50% and 80% of care leavers are unemployed;
 - one in ten 16-17 year old claimants of DSS severe hardship payments have been in care.
- 1.2 The poor educational achievement of looked after children has considerable implications for their future life chances and earning potential. The research findings have driven a range of initiatives in England to improve the educational outcomes of looked after children. Similarly, in Northern Ireland there is a growing interest in improving the educational outcomes of children who are looked after.
- 1.3 The area served by the BELB is not co-terminous with the boundaries of the Eastern Health and Social Services Board (EHSSB), which is the commissioning HSS Board for four Health and Social Services (HSS) Trusts (Down Lisburn, North and West Belfast, South and East Belfast and Ulster Community Hospitals). BELB covers the area served by N&W Belfast HSS Trust and the part of S&E Belfast HSS Trust which falls within Belfast City Council's boundary.
- 1.4 In reaching its judgments SSI took account of:
- discussion with the CEWO;
 - attendance at the Children's Services Joint Strategic Planning Group for Looked after Children, which is a sub-committee of the EHSSB's Children and Young People's Committee;

- attendance at an operational sub-group to raise the educational attainment of looked after children, which is tasked to develop interagency policies/procedures for looked after children;
- visits to two children's homes in the company of the EWO who is the designated worker for children's residential units in S&E Belfast HSS Trust;
- discussion with EWOs and HSS Board and Trusts staff.

2. The Findings

- 2.1 Awareness of the educational needs of looked after children is evident from discussion with both EWS and social services staff. An audit of the looked after children within the BELB area is an essential first stage in planning future services targeted on improving their educational outcomes. To this end, work has commenced to identify looked after children within the BELB's area, the schools they attend and the level of their attainment. This audit has been led by an Information Research Officer employed by the EHSSB, with the EWS having a role in collecting information on children's attainment levels from schools. Due to staff changes within the EHSSB the completion of the audit has been delayed. The CEWO advises that when the audit information is available it is planned to pilot the use of Personal Education Plans (PEP) for looked after children to ensure that there is an assessment of their educational needs and specific plans to address any identified deficits.
- 2.2 There is a commitment within the EWS to work in partnership with social services staff from both the EHSSB and its relevant HSS Trusts. The CEWO is a member of the Looked After Children Sub-Committee of the EHSSB's Children and Young People's Committee. She also chairs the two sub-groups of this committee. A change of personnel within a HSS Trust has meant that recently these meetings have been convened without input from social services. The non-attendance of HSS Trust staff has caused concern among EWS staff who see the primary responsibility for advancing the agenda to improve the educational outcomes of looked after children resting with the corporate parent ie the HSS Trust which looks after the child. The CEWO has been in contact with the EHSSB in an effort to ensure HSS Trust participation in these meetings and another member of staff has now been nominated to sit on these committees. From discussion with staff it seems that the change of personnel was the primary reason for the non-involvement of social services personnel in these meetings. There was, however, some concern noted that plans being made by the EWS regarding the planned development of PEPs might duplicate the education aspects of the looked after children review. Concerns were also expressed about additional work for social services without the allocation of additional resources to enable them to undertake successfully what they perceived as additional duties.

- 2.3 For the past eight years, the CEWO has received notification from N&W Belfast HSS Trust when a child begins or ceases to be looked after by it. There is not, however, a complete database, as information is not provided on children already within the looked after population, nor is notification received when a child who entered public care during infancy, progresses to primary school. Despite the shortcomings within the existing notification system operated between N&W Belfast HSS Trust and the CEWO, it represents a positive approach to sharing information and provides the basis for developing in the future a database on looked after children. Currently, the CEWO receives no notification from S&E Belfast HSS Trust, when a child becomes, or ceases to be, looked after by it. There is a need for better communication of information across the education and social services sectors to ensure that relevant EWS personnel know about children who are looked after. Information exchange would enable the EWS either to provide additional supports to a school with a high enrolment of looked after children or to supply additional support to maintain looked after children within school settings.
- 2.4 Looked after children live in a range of placements such as with their family under the terms of a Care Order, or with foster carers, or in children's homes. EWOs report that much of their work is focused on the last of these groups of children who present considerable challenges in terms of their engagement or re-engagement with education services. The difficulty in re-integrating these children into school or engaging them with alternative education provision is considerable and suggest that greater focus needs to be placed on preventing these children being suspended or expelled from school.
- 2.5 In recognition of the particular difficulties faced by children in residential care, an EWO has been assigned the role of designated EWO for S&E Belfast HSS Trust's three children's homes which are located in Belfast City Council's area. The aim is to enhance communication between social services and schools and to raise awareness within each sector of the needs of individual children. The benefit of the deployment of a designated EWO is that it can improve the understanding of the school processes, on the part of residential social workers particularly regarding procedures relating to the statementing, suspension and expulsion of children and the appeals system which exist within the education processes. During the visit observed the EWO was able to explain how a rolling programme of suspension could result in a maximum period of 45 days and to outline the notification system required when a school was embarking on a rolling programme of suspension. From a school's perspective the visit can also provide a single point of contact when difficulties arise relating to a specific child.
- 2.6 In S&E Belfast HSS Trust, SLG operate in schools. The groups consist of a social worker, EWO, school nurse, educational psychologist and teachers. The aim is to ensure early identification of school-based problems and the drawing up of a multi-disciplinary support plan. By making alternative provision, the aim is to

reduce the number of referrals to statutory services. The SLGs are targeted on schools in most need and operate best in schools which are committed to working in a multi-agency manner. SLGs also exist within N&W Belfast HSS Trust, although without dedicated workers from either the HSS Trust or EWS, largely due to recruitment difficulties in both services.

- 2.7 According to EWS staff, there is a tendency for schools (particularly in the primary sector) either to delay referral of children to the EWS, or to limit referrals to children with attendance-based problems. EWOs recognise that earlier intervention has greater prospect of success as it prevents problems of attendance or behaviour becoming entrenched. Earlier identification of children with school-based difficulties would enable the EWS to make appropriate referrals to HSS Trusts and could reduce the need for children to become looked after in the future. The CEWO advises that work is currently underway to re-profile the EWS so that interventions are targeted at the primary school sector and preventative approaches. This shift of focus will, however, take time to implement in practice. In the meantime the current staffing level limits the opportunity for developing preventative working approaches.
- 2.8 Within social services there was a perception that the EWOs generally regarded their role as ended once a child became looked after, unless at that time there was a specific difficulty relating to school. A number of social services respondents outlined the potential to develop the professional social work role of the EWO through developing their individual casework and group work inputs within the school settings. EWOs reported that they welcomed the opportunity to be involved with children following their admission to care and saw attendance at review meetings as a means of providing an effective bridge between schools and social services when a looked after child had school-based difficulties. EWOs noted that they found attendance at review meetings for looked after children helpful both in terms of sharing information and in gaining a better understanding of how best to work with the children regarding their attendance or behaviour in school.
- 2.9 Within the BELB, there are no services specifically targeted at looked after children. Instead, these children access available services if they meet the criteria for admission into the EWS provision. Anecdotally, looked after children are over-represented in terms of both their referral to and attendance at alternative education provision (AEP) outside mainstream education. The absence, however, of baseline information on looked after children means that the EWS is unable to quantify the level of suspensions and expulsions and to ascertain how this compares either within a specific school or across the BELB's area. It also reduces the opportunities to target support on schools with a high enrolment of looked after children aimed at increasing staff's awareness of their specific needs.

- 2.10 The EWS works across two HSS Trust areas, which have different approaches both to sharing information with the EWS and to structuring approaches to work with schools. For example, the SLG approach used in S&E Belfast HSS Trust is used on a more 'ad hoc' basis within the N&W Belfast HSS Trust area. Similarly, N&W Belfast HSS Trust in partnership with the BELB has funded a Community in Schools approach, which seeks to improve the awareness in schools in the communities they serve; it also seeks to encourage the community to come into schools and avail of tailored support programmes for parents. A comparable service is not available within S&E Belfast HSS Trust's area.

3. **Conclusion and Recommendations**

- 3.1 Educationally as a group, looked after children attain less well than their peers who are not looked after; while many of these children have no behavioural or attendance problems within school, some pose considerable challenges to teaching staff. It is essential that teachers are aware of and understand the needs of looked after children so that these children can be assisted effectively to meet their potential within the school system. While there is currently no data to substantiate the view that looked after children are disproportionately represented among children attending EOTAS provision, in receipt of tuition services, or suspended or expelled from school, this was the perception of many social services and EWS staff. The EWS is well placed to provide a link between social services and the education systems to the benefit of looked after children. There was evidence of a recognition within the EWS of the need for involvement at an earlier stage than is currently possible to prevent the removal of looked after children from school. There is also recognition of the need to work with schools to raise the awareness of staff to the needs of looked after children. There was clear evidence that the EWS was seeking to develop a more professional role than that it perceived others had of it, namely of being attendance officers.
- 3.2 The EWS has afforded priority to working with looked after children as demonstrated by the work which has commenced on auditing the education needs of looked after children, the assignment of an EWO to cover all children's homes in S&E Belfast HSS Trust and by the efforts made to ensure social services engagement in the two sub-groups chaired by the CEWO. There are, however, differences in the way the two HSS Trusts operate in relation to looked after children and these differences present issues relating to the sharing of information and the development across the EWS of a consistent approach to working with looked after children. Comments from social services colleagues indicate that there are generally good working relationships between EWOs and social services staff. There were, however, some suggestions relating to the need for the EWS to define better its role, to develop further its professional contribution within the education system in respect of looked after children and to focus more on preventative approaches at an earlier intervention stage.

3.3 To assist with developing the EWS further the following recommendations are made.

1. The CEWO should pursue with the EHSSB the completion of the audit of looked after children to enable the establishment of a database.
2. The CEWO should liaise with managers from S&E Belfast and N&W Belfast HSS Trusts to develop an information system that would ensure that the EWS is notified by the Trusts whenever a child begins, or ceases, to be looked after, or changes school. The information provided should include details relating to the child's educational needs which could inform the work which the EWS provides to facilitate the child's ongoing education. This information would enable a database to be kept up-to-date.
3. The CEWO should liaise with N&W Belfast HSS Trust regarding the appointment of a designated EWO for looked after children, particularly those living in children's homes. She should also raise with S&E Belfast the possibility of extending the existing designated EWO's role to children who are in foster care or placed at home with parents.
4. The staffing level within the EWS service should be reviewed by the BELB to ensure that there are adequate resources to work preventatively with looked after children to reduce the potential for them to be suspended or expelled from school.
5. The CEWO should liaise with the EHSSB and the two HSS Trusts to ensure that the approaches being developed within the EWS in relation to establishing protocols to inform referral processes and PEPs are taken forward in a joint manner to ensure the successful implementation of these positive approaches.
6. The CEWO should collate information on an annual basis to assess if looked after children are disproportionately represented in the following areas:
 - referrals to, or attendance at, alternative educational programmes;
 - suspensions or expulsions from school.

A Report of a Survey of the Educational Welfare Service in The North-Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The EWS in NEELB employs 41 permanent staff comprising the CEWO, five SEWOs, 25 EWOs and three teachers to support the provision for looked after children. The staff also includes one full-time and seven part-time administrative members.
- 1.2 The NEELB's EWS is organised at four bases, with an office in Coleraine, Antrim, Ballymena and Jordanstown. A SEWO manages each division. In addition, another SEWO manages a Training and Development Team based at the Jordanstown EWS offices.
- 1.3 In addition to her responsibilities for the EWS, the CEWO has responsibility for child protection for the NEELB. This responsibility is a time consuming and demanding task, and involves the CEWO in considerable commitments to the child protection area; for example, in the 2001/02 period, the time spent on child protection issues equates to 62 days. While the survey findings indicate that the issue of and responsibility for child protection are rightly placed within the EWS, the current arrangements place undue demands on the CEWO. It is noted that the NEELB has reviewed recently the position regarding responsibility for child protection matters and intends to create a senior post with significant responsibility for this area of work. The survey team endorses this course of action as appropriate and supportive of the overall management and administration of the EWS.

2. The Management of The Service

- 2.1 The considerable commitment of the CEWO, the SEWOs and the EWOs to the education welfare work is evident, and underpins all that the service seeks to achieve in securing the education, pastoral care and welfare of all the pupils it serves.
- 2.2 The roles and responsibilities of the staff and the established structures that direct the service have been carefully constructed and agreed, and are set down in comprehensive detail in the EWS's documentation.
- 2.3 The EWS is led by an experienced and effective CEWO whose vision for the service and concern for the pupils and the schools provide a firm basis for its success and help to promote the profile of the EWS. To strengthen the influence on practice of the EWS's philosophy, the SEWOs have worked hard, and with success, to establish a range of local structures that ensure clear channels of communication throughout the EWS, effective service level agreements and accessible points of contact for the pupils, their parents and the schools. In a

number of instances, the divisional teams' work is impressive, particularly the contribution the EWS makes to the front line work with other schools and agencies such as the Police Juvenile Liaison Bureau in Coleraine, the Looked After Children provision, the work initiated with the travellers groups, the Family Consultation meetings at Ballymena and the Parenting and Young Persons groups in Newtownabbey. The members of staff with responsibility for the core business of school support work and home visits carry out their duties conscientiously, and with due sensitivity for, and commitment to, the individual needs of the pupils.

- 2.4 The EWS maintains extensive records indicating the demands made of the service and the cases closed due to successful intervention. In the previous year, from September 2000 to June 2001, some 2424 cases were referred to the EWS and 544 cases were closed successfully with a further 424 cases closed due to the pupils reaching school leaving age. This work required some 7784 school visits and 7079 home visits. The collated figures for average attendance across the NEELB range from 91.3% at the post-primary level to 96.3% at the primary level. The EWS is rightly satisfied with the influence of, and receptiveness to, its work and records some 259 satisfied or very satisfied responses from the 288 schools which responded to the Annual Service Level Agreement Satisfaction Survey carried out by the EWS. The arrangements in place for monitoring and recording the work of the EWS, particularly the staff supervision procedures, are effective and appropriate and well regarded as an integral aspect of promoting self evaluation.
- 2.5 A written presentation prepared by the EWS for the survey gave an analysis of the time spent in primary, post-primary, special and grammar schools from January to March 2002 (50 working days). The EWS was found to have dedicated 72.3% of its time to the post-primary sector, 17% to the primary sector, 2.5% to the special school sector and 8.2% to the grammar school sector. While the figures reveal that the EWS spends most of its time in the post-primary sector, the evidence indicates an increase in the referrals from the primary sector. The EWS is currently analysing the implications of its statistical returns and has introduced an effective business plan to address the identified demands on the service. This survey endorses the structures in place as effective and sufficient, and indicates the need for a designated EWO to enhance the work of the primary sector.
- 2.6 The EWS business plan for 2002/03 usefully outlines priorities which reflect the NEELB's strategic planning. The corporate goals set out in the plan indicate a much broader remit for the EWS including the promotion of social inclusion, the raising of educational standards through improved attendance levels, the promotion of a culture of self-evaluation and assessment, and a commitment to establishing a strategic protocol for working in partnership with relevant people, schools and agencies. The plan characterises the high standards that the EWS

expects of its work. However, it would enhance the business plan if outcomes were clarified further and stated as supportive of the core business of promoting attendance as integral to re-engaging pupils in learning.

- 2.7 The organisation and administration of the EWS are good. Procedures are formal but not rigid; routines and procedures are effective and well established. There is a useful staff handbook and an informative set of policies for the staff that help to promote cohesion and consistency.
- 2.8 The service has initiated support for traveller children for three-four days per month. The quality of the work of the EWO with responsibility for this provision is of a high standard; she has established a good working knowledge of, and working relationships with, the traveller families. Procedures to establish a more broadly-based approach are beginning to develop. The attendance of most of the traveller children is improving as a consequence. One important feature of the provision is the link formed with the designated officer for traveller children in the BELB and the sharing of information to enhance the approaches across the NEELB and BELB areas. The lack of co-ordination of provision at a management level, however, is a challenge facing the service; it is noted that plans are underway to address this issue.

3. **Ethos**

- 3.1 The EWS promotes, with good effect, a supportive ethos where the pupils' welfare is fostered and developed. Relationships at all levels are excellent; a good sense of teamwork is evident. The EWOs know the pupils well; they have an empathy with the pupils' circumstances and make every effort to encourage their attendance at school and participation in education. The pupils' individual efforts are recognised and praised and families are listened to sensitively. The EWO is often the only visiting professional to the home and is regarded by many parents as an advocate who acts on the best interests of the child. As a consequence, many of the pupils benefit from the relationship they share with the EWO and take responsibility for their school attendance and attitude to learning.
- 3.2 A strong feature of the teamwork which characterises the EWS, relates to the quality of the SEWOs support for and advice to their staff and the pleasant manner in which business is conducted. The evidence from observation of the EWS at work indicates good quality inter-personal skills among the officers and reflects careful attention to the EWS's procedures, thorough planning for meetings, and appropriate training and teamwork. During one observation, for example, the EWO listened to a parent's view but remained focused on the need to get the child to agree to a phased return to school. In another observation, the SEWO and a member of his staff demonstrated good skills, respecting the parent's and the child's views and encouraging their agreement to a course of action for returning the child to school. In all of the sessions observed, the

quality of the EWOs' approach to parents and pupils facilitated a sense of trust and purpose.

4. **School Satisfaction Outcomes**

- 4.1 As part of the survey, a sample of eight schools was visited. The evidence of the school visits reveals a strong level of support for the EWS and an acknowledgement of the individual efforts of the EWOs who are highly regarded for their knowledge and sensitivity, and endeavours on behalf of the schools. The Service Level Agreement was singled out as a useful framework that clearly defines the operation of the provision. Mention was made in a number of responses of the usefulness of the projects which provide a preventative support and help the schools to develop a more active approach to pupils at risk of disaffection and non-attendance. In general, the schools have a good awareness of the developing role of the EWS and of the procedures to access the service: in one instance, concern was expressed at the degree of paperwork demanded by the EWS and of the consequent delay in accessing immediate support. However, this comment referred to the initial referral only. The school satisfaction survey for the service indicates the need to maintain regular contact with the schools, to keep the schools fully aware of the breadth of provision of the welfare service and to impress on schools their responsibility regarding the contribution of the EWS within a whole school approach to promoting the pupils' pastoral care and educational engagement.

5. **Working Practices of The Educational Welfare Officers**

- 5.1 The survey team observed a variety of working situations in which the EWOs carried out a range of routine and challenging duties. In almost all of the instances, the work observed was of a good or better standard. The notable features of the best practice included:
- the personable ethos promoted by individual EWOs;
 - the clearly established purpose of the EWS activity;
 - the strong commitment of the EWOs to the pupils' welfare;
 - the generous time afforded to individual cases;
 - the shared links with other agencies such as the youth service and the social services.
- 5.2 The EWOs display good working knowledge of the welfare system and its contribution to the education process. Staff meetings and training days provide a forum for discussion and debate, and help to ensure that all are well informed of the developments of the EWS. The arrangements in place to guide the staff in relation to child protection, personal safety issues, and working practices are communicated well, fit for the purpose and serve to support the staff in most

contexts. The incidents of aggression experienced by individual EWOs warrant review and consideration of appropriate arrangements including staff deployment and access to a personal communication system to keep EWOs in touch with their base. The service is currently contributing to a five-board review of DE circular 1999/10 'Pastoral Care including Child Protection'.

- 5.3 The arrangements for staff deployment are sufficient and provide opportunities for individual members of staff to gain experience of core and project work. Further consideration could be afforded to staff movement across teams to allow individual members to avail of opportunities of working with different teams and in various schools settings.
- 5.4 The EWS has developed an exemplary system of staff appraisal which has the potential to identify useful benchmarks for the promotion of high standards and self-evaluation procedures. Monthly supervision meetings keep senior managers in the EWS aware of the quality of practice across the NEELB and indicate priority needs for action at staff meetings and training days.
- 5.5 The EWS has not invested in an electronic system to support its work and often time is used ineffectively on paper recordings and transcriptions. This area should be prioritised for improvement.

6. **Professional Development/Induction Programme**

- 6.1 The EWS maintains an effective induction and in-service training (INSET) programme. Topics are agreed in advance and cover a breadth of aspects of the work of the EWS. The programme has a clear focus on key strategic themes pertinent to the attendance targets set by the DE, and on the creation of plans to achieve the targets. A useful feature of the training is the recording of feedback information indicating the benefits of the training in terms of the objectives set, the knowledge and skills acquired and recommendations for future training.
- 6.2 While it is not possible within the remit of this report to make comment on the professional qualifications required for the position of EWO, the subject drew a considerable number of comments in discussions with members of the EWS. Among the comments made was the general belief that the EWS is greatly enhanced by the introduction of the social work qualification as a requirement for entry to the EWS. However, some senior members of staff expressed concern about the limited educational input of the course, particularly in relation to special educational needs and the Code of Practice, and, more generally, in terms of the NEELB's overall educational provision. Individual EWOs reported that the initial training did not equip them sufficiently for the range of work which followed. It would be helpful for the NEELB to ensure that the course providers are aware of any such reservations and of the need to include a discrete module defining the EWS role and the additional skills and knowledge competencies

needed to carry out the job effectively. The EWS induction programme should be debated across the ELBs to ensure consistency and to assist the development of appropriate competencies as benchmarks for best EWS practice.

7. **Involvement with Projects, Programmes and Partnership Committees**

7.1 The EWS has pioneered a range of projects and support programmes for a number of years and has produced evaluations of the impact of the work in an attempt to inform practice and develop a system of self-evaluation within each area team. Projects are in place in all districts and are currently particularly active in the northern, central, and southern areas. A project and development team of one SEWO and two EWOs provide support to the area teams and positive encouragement to a number of young teenagers who have struggled for a variety of personal and social reasons to remain engaged with school. The variety and quality of the work undertaken are notable and include:

- parenting courses;
- a Looked After Children Project;
- a Retracking Project;
- a School Aged Mothers Project;²
- school youth projects;
- an Area Behaviour Support Team project.

7.2 The sessions observed by the survey team were of a high calibre. There is evidence that the project approach is a useful preventative course of action; it is effective and contributes significantly to the breadth of work of the service. The survey findings suggest that there would be value in the involvement of the EWS in project/preventative work across the ELBs. A co-ordinated approach would ensure that such developments arise from a strategic debate which seeks to clarify, from a Northern Ireland group perspective, the policy directing the expanding approach of the service. In such a debate it will be important to ensure that the core business of attendance is central to planning and that a balance of project and traditional work is maintained and effectively integrated into a singular 'modus operandi' for the service.

² Not operating this current year

8. **Accommodation and Resources**

- 8.1 The NEELB provides good accommodation for the EWS. The schools welcome the localisation of the service in area teams.

9. **Conclusion**

- 9.1 The EWS has a number of important strengths and is an exemplar of good practice in many aspects of its work. These include: a central role in reinforcing the NEELB's general aim to create an ethos which encourages all pupils to engage with education and feel valued as a consequence; the strong commitment and vision of the CEWO and the EWS staff to securing the welfare and educational interest of the pupils; the very good relationships and inter-personal skills of the EWS staff; the very good quality of much of the work observed; the broad range of provision and good quality of the project work, and the effective and efficient management and administration of the EWS, including the induction and training programme. A small number of areas for improvement have been identified. These relate to: the further consideration of the business plan, the need to review the arrangements for communication between staff and their base locations, and the need to introduce an ICT support system.
- 9.2 The aims of the NEELB's EWS are being achieved in large measure and the evidence of this survey indicates that all concerned with the EWS can have confidence in the current provision.

North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) – The Role of The Education Welfare Service (EWS) in Relation to The Education of Looked After Children

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The term “looked after children” refers to children who are cared for by a HSS Trust either under the terms of a Care Order, or accommodated under a voluntary agreement between the parents, or others with parental responsibility, and a HSS Trust. Research in recent years has found that in terms of educational attainment, looked after children do less well than other children, even those from comparable social, economic and family backgrounds. The Health Committee Report, “Children Looked After by Local Authorities” (House of Commons 1998, London: The Stationery Office), noted (Para 46) that:
- between 50% and 75% of school leavers who have been in care (care leavers) complete their schooling with no formal qualifications compared with only 6% of the general population;
 - between 12% and 19% of care leavers go on to further education compared with 68% of the general population;
 - between 50% and 80% of care leavers are unemployed;
 - one in ten 16-17 year old claimants of DSS severe hardship payments have been in care.
- 1.2 The poor educational achievement of looked after children has considerable implications for their future life chances and earning potential. The research findings have driven a range of initiatives in England to improve the educational outcomes of looked after children. Similarly, in Northern Ireland there is a growing interest in improving the educational outcomes of children who are looked after.
- 1.3 The NEELB's Education Welfare Service makes arrangements for and provides support for looked after children as part of its work. The area served by the NEELB is not coterminous with the boundaries of the Northern Health and Social Services Board (NHSSB), as the Cookstown sector of Homefirst HSS Trust falls within the Southern Education and Library Board's (SELB's) area. The CEWO does not, therefore, have information on the total number of children looked after within the NEELB's area. Recent audits completed by the NHSSB and the EWS in respect of children living in children's homes (2000) or with foster carers (2001) have, however, provided a snapshot of the looked after population and their educational attainments. The co-operation and joint approach to assessing the educational needs of looked after children demonstrated by the EWS and NHSSB personnel are commended. To cope with the non-coterminous boundaries with

the NEELB, the NHSSB also includes staff from the SELB in looked after children planning fora.

1.4 In reaching its judgments, the SSI took account of:

- discussion with the CEWO;
- discussion with the SEWO with responsibility for the LAC Support Teachers Project;
- discussion with two LAC Support Teachers;
- attendance at a meeting of the looked after children education group, which is a sub-committee of the NHSSB's Children and Young People's Committee;
- a visit to a children's home which has education on site provided by a LAC Support Teacher;
- audit reports entitled 'Audit of the Educational Experiences and Attainments of Children and Young People in Foster Care in the NHSSB Area' (November 2001) and 'Audit of the Educational Experiences and Achievements of Children and Young People in Children's Homes' (NHSSB/NEELB, September 2000);
- discussion with social services staff employed by Homefirst and Causeway HSS Trusts and NHSSB.

2. The Findings

2.1 There is a clear awareness on the part of the EWS of the needs of looked after children and an interest in promoting and improving their educational opportunities and attainments. There is also a commitment to work in partnership with social services staff from the NHSSB and its two provider HSS Trusts (Homefirst and Causeway). The CEWO is a member of the NHSSB's Children and Young People's sub-committee, established to address the education needs of looked after children. The work of this sub-committee feeds into the NHSSB's Children's Services Planning process, which is required under the Children (1995 Order) (Amendment) (Children's Services Planning) Order (Northern Ireland) 1998.

2.2 Currently, there are no arrangements in place to ensure that either the CEWO or the NEELB is notified when a child becomes, or ceases to be, looked after. Consequently, the recent audit work had to identify looked after children from the social services information system (SOSCARE) and then manually assign to each child's name the school attended. Contact was then made with the children's schools to acquire an individual assessment of each child's level of attainment. Staff are commended for the commitment and effort demonstrated

by them in accessing the required information. However, the data has provided only a snapshot of the looked after population at specific points in time and has not resulted in the establishment of a joint database to ensure that similar exercises can be carried out over time. The job description of the Education Support Worker recruited at the end of 2001 includes responsibility for the development of a database of looked after children. Even when this database is established, arrangements will be required to ensure it remains current through the inclusion of information when children either become looked after or cease to be looked after. Effective communication of information across the education and social services sectors is necessary to ensure that relevant personnel have up-to-date information on the educational, social, emotional and physical well-being of looked after children. Information exchange would also enable the EWS to provide additional support to a school with a high enrolment of looked after children, or supply additional support to maintain looked after children within school settings.

- 2.3 According to EWS staff, there is a tendency for schools, (particularly primary schools) either to delay the referral of children to the EWS, or to limit referrals to children with attendance-based problems. The past role of the EWO in terms of securing children's attendance at school has been slow to change in some schools. This perception consequently limits early intervention with those children targeted at risk of disengagement from the school/education systems. The EWOs recognise that earlier intervention has greater prospect of success, as it will assist in preventing problems of attendance or behaviour becoming entrenched. The CEWO advises, however, that the current staffing level limits the opportunity for preventative working. She is, however, anxious to develop early intervention as it is recognised that such an approach is more likely to succeed.
- 2.4 The need for an effective interface between the NEELB and the NHSSB for looked after children, has resulted in a shared policy between both agencies. Implementation of that policy is being pursued through the development of the LAC Support Teacher Project. Recommendation 4.10 of the audit³ undertaken on children living in children's homes states:

"The NHSSB and NEELB to jointly commission the appointment of 2 professionally qualified teachers on an NHSSB area wide basis to develop and take lead in implementing an action plan by which to achieve the full set of recommendations set out above; and provide advice and support to individual looked after children, their carers, and education and social services staff, upon request from statutory reviews."

³ *The NHSSB Audit of the Education Experiences and Achievements of Children and Young People in Children's Homes – September 2000.*

- 2.5 This project is located within the EWS and two teachers were appointed in March 2001. The NHSSB's Children's Service Planning LAC sub-group acts as a reference group to guide the development of this project. The rationale for the teachers' placement within the EWS, rather than in social services, was to ensure they were not professionally isolated and in recognition of their teaching background. In September 2001, a third member of staff was added to the team. Her role differs considerably from that of the other two support teachers as she is based within a children's home and is tasked with providing education on site to any child who may be out of school, and educational support to looked after children attending school and the schools themselves. In December 2001, an Education Support Worker was appointed on a part-time basis to manage the work of the LAC teachers and to take the lead role in inter-agency support to meet the needs of looked after children within the NHSSB's area. In February 2002 an Inter-Board Management Group was established to direct the work of the LAC Support Team. The Group consists of representatives from NHSSB, Homefirst and Causeway HSS Trusts; it includes an Assistant Senior Educational Welfare Officer, a Senior Educational Psychologist, SEWO and is chaired by the CEWO. The partnership between the NEELB and NHSSB and the creation of a LAC support team demonstrate considerable innovation and a willingness to work across both professional and agency boundaries. Staff are commended for the work which they have undertaken to date and their commitment to changing the educational outcomes for looked after children.
- 2.6 There has been, however, a degree of confusion regarding the role of the initial two support workers. Given their teaching background and their job title, a number of respondents were of the view that these staff would teach looked after children who were out of school. To assist with clarifying their role a new job description was negotiated when the third member of staff was added to the team. From discussion, it would appear that there are still issues regarding their role and a questioning of why the task needs to be carried out by a teacher. There is, however, agreement that the post requires a sound knowledge of the education system and credibility with school principals. A number of the duties in terms of awareness raising and negotiation between social services and schools are within the professional competence of an EWO. The rationale for appointing only teachers when at this stage there are no teaching duties is unclear. The bid which the EWS is making for Peace 2 monies would if successful, create a multi-disciplinary team to work with looked after children.
- 2.7 The absence of baseline information on looked after children means that the EWS is unable to quantify the level of suspensions and expulsions and to ascertain how this compares either within a specific school or across the NEELB's area. It also reduces the opportunities to target support on schools with a high enrolment of looked after children aimed at increasing staff's awareness of their specific needs. One of the key duties of the Education Support Worker is to

develop and monitor the implementation of procedures relating to the education of looked after children including:

- enrolment;
- personal educational plans (PEPs);
- suspensions and expulsions;
- out of school support.

- 2.8 Work is currently ongoing to develop the range of policies and to pilot PEPs in a number of areas. In the absence of local guidance staff have been referring to the DfES guidance, "Education of Young People in Public Care" (2000).
- 2.9 Looked after children live in a range of placements such as with their family under the terms of a Care Order, or with foster carers, or in children's homes. The last group of children present considerable challenge to EWOs. During the course of this survey there was considerable variation in the level of school attendance across children's homes within the NHSSB's area, ranging from 100% attendance to 80% non-attendance. It was also noted that when one child in a children's home refuses to engage with education often this can spread throughout the residential group. The difficulty in re-integrating school children who are in residential care, or engaging them with alternative education provision, is considerable and suggests that greater focus needs to be placed on preventing their suspension or expulsion. Common difficulties included the refusal by children to engage with any form of educational intervention and also the problem of finding a school willing to offer a place to a looked after child who is out of school. A clear distinction was made between the needs of children in residential care as opposed to those living with foster carers. A range of respondents noted that the presence of a designated person, such as a foster carer, with whom they could liaise regarding a child's educational needs, yielded a more focused approach and better outcomes for children. The support teachers have recently provided training to a group of foster carers to assist them to negotiate more effectively with schools on behalf of their foster child. It is envisaged that similar awareness-raising sessions will be provided to field and residential social work staff.
- 2.10 The availability of the LAC support teachers provides a link for both foster carers and residential units. This arrangement has the potential to create greater understanding of the educational and social well-being of looked after children. By contrast, the EWOs remain attached to a number of schools, rather than being allocated work targeted on a specific group of children, such as looked after children. As the EWOs regularly visit schools they are well placed to identify and deal with emerging difficulties at an early stage. There is a need to ensure clarity of role between the LAC support teachers and the EWO to avoid confusion or duplication of effort.

- 2.11 Within social services there has been a perception that the EWOs regarded their role as ended once a child became looked after, unless at that time there was a specific difficulty relating to acquiring education for the child. Conversely, EWOs reported that they welcomed the opportunity to be involved with children after their admission to care. EWOs stated that there was an inconsistency in their being invited by social services to attend looked after children's review meetings. EWOs noted that when they were invited to such review meetings they found attendance helpful both in terms of sharing information and in gaining a better understanding of how best to work with the children regarding their attendance or behaviour in school.
- 2.12 In addition to the LAC Support Teachers Project, children access a range of alternative education services if they meet the criteria for admission to these programmes. Anecdotally, looked after children are over-represented in terms of both their referral to and attendance at alternative education provision outside mainstream education. The absence, however, of a database on these children means that staff's perceptions in this area cannot be confirmed.
- 2.13 In the absence of appropriate arrangements, some children self-refer to social workers once they have been suspended from school. This is accepted on face value and the child begins the process of disengaging from school. Common understanding and clear lines of communication are needed so that there are effective links between schools and social services. In the NEELB, as the LAC Support Teacher Project develops it will be important to ensure clear lines of accountability for looked after children within the EWS. The absence in schools and children's homes of a designated member of staff responsible for the education of looked after children also reduces the potential for staff in either sector to build up a range of skills in working with this small but particularly vulnerable group of children.

3. **Conclusion and Recommendations**

- 3.1 Educationally as a group, looked after children attain less well than their peers who are not looked after; while many of these children have no behavioural or attendance problems within school, some pose considerable challenges to teaching staff. It is essential that teachers are aware of and understand the needs of looked after children so that these children can be assisted effectively to meet their potential within the school system. While there is currently no data to substantiate the view that looked after children are disproportionately represented among children attending EOTAS AEP provision, or in receipt of tuition services, or suspended or expelled from school, this was the perception of many social services and EWS staff. The EWS is well placed to provide a link between social services and the education systems to the benefit of looked after children. There was evidence of a recognition within the EWS of the need for involvement at an earlier stage than is currently possible to prevent the removal

of looked after children from school. There is also recognition of the need to work with schools to raise the awareness of staff of the needs of looked after children. There was clear evidence that the EWS was seeking to develop a more professional role than that it perceived others had of it, namely of being attendance officers.

- 3.2 The EWS has afforded considerable priority to working with looked after children as demonstrated by the recent educational audits which have been undertaken, and the formulation of a joint NEELB/NHSSB policy for looked after children. The innovative approach to working with looked after children which has been created by the establishment of a LAC Support Teachers Project, and the range of duties established for the Education Support Worker, are all commended as they illustrate in a tangible manner the priority afforded to improving the educational outcomes for children.
- 3.3 Comments from social services colleagues indicate that there are generally good working relationships between EWOs and social services staff although at times there are frustrations because of the difficulties in acquiring education services for specific children.
- 3.4 To assist with further developing the EWS the following recommendations are made.
1. The CEWO should ensure that the duties established in the job description of the Education Support Worker, in relation to establishing a database of looked after children and reporting annually on a range of other measures relating to the education of looked after children, are facilitated by securing the commitment of the NHSSB and its provider HSS Trusts to provide and update all necessary information to fulfil these tasks.
 2. The CEWO should consider the role and functions of EWOs and the LAC Support Teachers to ensure clarity and the avoidance of overlap and duplication. The CEWO should develop approaches to increase the awareness of the EWOs' role within schools and social services, particularly in relation to their work with looked after children.
 3. The staffing level within the EWS service should be reviewed by the NEELB to ensure that priority is afforded to preventative work with looked after children and is targeted at reducing the number of them suspended or expelled from school or leaving school without qualifications.
 4. The CEWO should liaise with the NEELB to acquire funding to secure the Education Support Worker post when existing funding ends. Efforts should also be made to have this post funded on a full-time basis.

A Report of a Survey of The Education Welfare Service in The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB)

1. Introduction

The Education Welfare Service (EWS) in the SELB is organised in geographical area teams, namely the Craigavon team, the Armagh team, the Dungannon team and the Newry team. A SEWO manages each team. The EWS has a complement of 25 officers, supported by one administrative staff member.

- 1.2 In addition to her responsibilities for the Education Welfare Service, one of the CEWO's main responsibilities is to act as the SELB's Designated Child Protection Officer. This duty takes up a significant amount of the CEWO's time and detracts from other management duties. While the survey findings indicate that the issue of and responsibility for child protection are rightly placed within the EWS, the current arrangements place undue demands on the CEWO with the equivalent of 50 days per year spent on these duties. The SELB should review this role as a matter of urgency.

2. Management of The Service

- 2.1 The EWS is managed by the CEWO supported by four SEWOs. The CEWO reports directly to the Head of the Pupil and Parent Unit within the SELB Education Department. She has been in post for the last two years and in that time has initiated significant management changes to the way the service is run. Chief among these has been the initiation of a review of EWS policies and procedures and the completion of a Development Plan 2001/2002 which the CEWO considers will inform and promote effective practice. The CEWO has also been involved in the Education Welfare Service Working Party set up in July 2001 to identify a number of strategic and developmental goals for the service.
- 2.2 The CEWO provides good leadership and this is reflected in the teamwork and collaboration among all staff. Management and administration of the EWS are efficient and well co-ordinated. The senior members of staff provide a clear focus and purpose to the EWS and actively seek contributions from members of the teams.
- 2.3 The CEWO's, the SEWOs' and the EWOs' commitment to their work is evident, and they are commended for their concern for the education, pastoral care and welfare of the pupils for whom they provide a service. The recent production of guidance on policy and procedures and the local development of structures help to ensure clear lines of contact throughout the service and with pupils, their parents and schools, and provide consistent direction for the staff. In a minority of schools, there is still work to be done on clarifying these new arrangements and the emerging changes in the EWS role.

- 2.4 The roles and responsibilities of the staff, and the well-established structures that direct the work of the EWS, have been carefully considered and provide comprehensive direction to ensure the consistent operation of the EWS work.
- 2.5 The work across the divisions, particularly the contribution the EWS makes to the front line work with schools and other agencies such as Barnardos, the Armagh Probation Office and Kilkeel Health Centre, provides a sound basis for preventative work in relation to pupils' attendance. The EWS involvement in projects to improve pupils' engagement with learning, has greatly enhanced its profile and is encouraging schools to plan strategically for pupils who may be at risk of non-attendance. The core business of school and home visits is well regarded by the system, and it is evident that individual EWOs carry out their duties diligently, and with due sensitivity for, and commitment to, the individual needs of the pupils. The survey findings indicate the need to maintain a balance between the core activities and the pursuit of projects and school initiatives. It will also be important to continue the dialogue with the minority of schools to encourage their further involvement in the range of EWS services.

3. **Ethos**

- 3.1 The EWS promotes a caring and supportive ethos, and relationships at all levels are very good. A good sense of teamwork is evident. The EWOs know the pupils well; they have empathy with the pupils' circumstances and make every effort to encourage their attendance and involvement in education. The pupils' well-being is fostered and developed; efforts by individual pupils are recognised and praised and their families are listened to sensitively. The EWO is often the only visiting professional to the home and is regarded by many parents as an advocate who represents their child's best interests; this role requires skill, tact and persistence from all concerned. In a small minority of schools, the EWO's advice is challenged but discussion remains professional and mutually respectful. In the vast majority of instances, the pupils benefit from the relationship which they share with the EWO and develop responsibility for their school attendance and attitude to learning.
- 3.2 The interactions with pupils, parents and schools were distinguished by the very good quality of the relationships. The officers have worked hard to develop productive working relationships and have established clear procedures in carrying out their duties. In a minority of schools, it has been difficult to sustain continuity and cohesion due to frequent changes of EWO staff caused by continuing difficulties with recruitment and retention.
- 3.3 The CEWO and SEWOs have achieved much in encouraging and supporting a positive ethos through the promotion of effective communication arrangements and relationships within the EWS, the SELB and externally. The completion of the review of the EWS has the potential to consolidate the current arrangements

and to utilise further the high level of skills and commitment that the EWOs bring to their work.

3.4 A strong feature of the EWS teamwork relates to the quality of the SEWOs' support for and advice to their staff and the agreeable manner in which business is conducted. The evidence from observation of the EWS at work indicates good quality inter-personal skills among the officers and reflects careful attention to the EWS's policies, thorough planning for meetings, and appropriate training and teamwork. In all of the sessions observed the quality of the EWOs' interaction facilitated a sense of confidence and assurance.

3.5 In summary, a number of factors contribute to the sound quality of the ethos. These include:

- clear guidance on working practices which provide consistency of EWOs' links with schools and parents;
- effective multi-disciplinary relationships with other professionals outside education;
- sound knowledge of the social environment of the schools and of their client families;
- the establishment of a genuine empathy with many of the homes that EWOs visit;
- the EWOs' willingness to listen to and understand the problems faced by families;
- the establishment of a real partnership with the schools.

4. **School/Parental Satisfaction Outcomes**

4.1 An associate assessor met with parents to hear their views on the EWS. The main points raised indicated that the majority of parents were concerned about their child and made contact with the EWS to access assistance and advice. A minority of parents were referred to the EWS by statutory services. Significantly, in the majority of cases, the first meeting took place within one day of the initial contact, and occurred in the child's home. All parents felt that the EWS had been clearly explained to them and that their views had been taken into account. All felt, after the first meeting, that the EWO would be able to provide help. The parents reported that their children were present at all further meetings and they felt this was an advantage. The feelings of the children were taken into account throughout. The parents expressed the view that the EWOs kept in regular

contact with them and were persistent in trying to solve problems. The parents felt they could contact the EWO and that response was always swift. The parents appreciated the practical help in a range of areas including:

- procuring uniforms and negotiating entrance to schools;
- mediating between schools and parents;
- arranging alternative educational provision;
- arranging home tutors;
- arranging individual counselling eg for bereavement.

The parents acknowledged the assistance given; two parents, for example, described how their relationship with the school had improved as a result of the EWS support. All of the parents expressed their thanks for, and appreciation of, the work of the EWOs. A significant number of parents said the EWOs 'did more than their job' to try and help them and their children. In summation, the parents indicated that:

- EWS staff were regarded highly as helpful and friendly;
- the length of time between referral and initial contact was considered to be very short;
- the EWOs actively encouraged the views and opinions of young persons in managing their own behaviours;
- home visits were deemed to be helpful;
- schools did not publicise the work of the EWS sufficiently;
- all appointments made by EWOs were kept and most were on time.

4.2 The school satisfaction survey was also carried out by the associate assessor who visited ten schools. The main findings were as follows:

- the EWS was highly regarded by the majority of schools; close working links were reflected in all responses;
- individual EWOs were seen as proactive members of the school team, advocates for the pupils and supportive of a range of school activities relating to pupil behavioural/anger management, attendance, transport and parental links;
- the schools highlighted specifically the role that the EWO plays in allaying any fears of parents;

- the schools appreciated the collaborative and cohesive links which the EWS helps to foster;
- the schools felt more could be done to publicise the expanding role of the EWS.

In a subsequent meeting, one principal, on behalf of a number of colleagues, wished to record a concern about the lack of consultation between the SELB and the schools in respect of the review of EWS. Concern particularly was expressed about the core business of the EWS, procedural issues, costing and the referral system. Clearly, the SELB will need to take account of the principals' views. However, the general tone of the information from the schools visited demonstrated respect for and appreciation of the EWS.

5. **Working Practices of The Education Welfare Officers**

- 5.1 The present working practices of the EWS are largely directed by the Children (NI) Order 1995 which became law in November 1996. The Children Order empowered ELBs to apply for Education Supervision Orders (ESOs) to improve the attendance of individual pupils.
- 5.2 The survey team observed a variety of working situations in which the EWOs carried out a typical range of routine and more challenging duties. In almost all of the instances, the work observed was of a good or better standard. The notable features of the best practice included:
- the agreeable ethos promoted by individual EWOs;
 - the clearly defined purpose of the EWS activity;
 - the strong commitment of the EWOs to the pupils' welfare;
 - the generous time afforded to individual cases;
 - the shared links with other agencies such as the youth and social services.
- 5.3 The EWOs have established effective links with a wide variety of other agencies associated with pupils' welfare, and they work well with colleagues from social services. These links provide added support for young people and their families in a variety of contexts. The arrangements in place to guide the staff in relation to child protection and personal safety issues and working practices are well communicated and serve to support the staff in most contexts. However, the incidents of aggression experienced by individual EWOs warrant analysis and consideration of the arrangements for staff deployment. The SELB has provided EWOs with access to a personal communication system to allow EWOs to keep in touch with their base; this is a sensible step.

5.4 The arrangements for staff development provide opportunities for individual members of staff to gain experience of core and project work. Further consideration could be afforded to staff movement across teams to allow individual members to avail of opportunities of working with different teams and in various schools settings. Such a policy might be best considered as part of the ongoing review of the EWS.

5.5 The EWS has not invested in an electronic system to support its work and often time is used ineffectively on paper recordings and transcriptions. This area should be prioritised for improvement.

6. Professional Development/Induction Programme

6.1 The EWS maintains an induction and INSET programme with topics covering a breadth of aspects of the work of the service. The programme has a clear focus on key strategic themes pertinent to the attendance targets set by DE. It will be important to include written policies and procedures for staff development and induction as the policies and procedures manual is developed further.

6.2 In discussion with the EWS staff a general view was expressed that the introduction of the social work qualification as a requirement for entry to the service had a positive impact on their professional profile and status, though some saw the initial training as insufficiently focused on the education aspects of their work. The induction programme was regarded as an important introduction to the educational aspect of the EWS, and newly appointed staff valued the advice and guidance from their more experienced colleagues. The SELB should ensure that the course providers are aware of the issue of appropriate qualification and of the need to include a discrete module defining the EWS and the additional skills and knowledge competencies needed to carry out effectively the role of the EWO job.

7. Involvement with Projects, Programmes and Partnership Committees

The EWS has a number of projects underway which enhance the profile of the service and contribute to the work of engaging pupils with their schools. The variety and quality of the work undertaken are notable and the range includes:

- a school Group Conferencing Partnership with Barnardos;
- Juvenile Bureau liaison;
- support for Newry traveller children;
- support for Kilkeel Teenage Health Programme;
- Craigbann Partnership;

- Newry and Mourne Inter-agency Forum on Domestic Violence;
- various projects promoting attendance in local primary schools;
- work with families of immigrant workers from Portugal in the Dungannon area to assist school placement and attendance.

The work of the EWS observed by the survey team was of good quality. The evidence endorses the project approach as effective and notes the significant impact of the work. The EWO teams respond well to local circumstances and needs, for example, the work to ensure school places for the children of Portuguese families employed locally is of a high quality. The survey findings indicate that the involvement of the EWS in project/preventative work should also be considered across the ELBs to promote the approach and to inform other schools of the potential that such work may have on keeping pupils engaged in school.

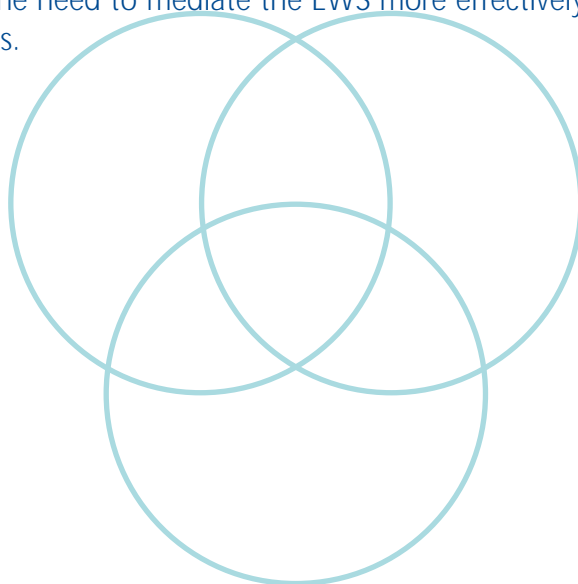
- 7.2 The EWO with responsibility to support traveller families has a good knowledge of the traveller families in his region, and he is committed to their general welfare. He has established useful links with a range of relevant bodies and organisations on traveller education and social issues, notably through the Cross-Border Forum for the Education of Travellers, SELB's CASS, and Newry and Mourne District Council Sub-Committee for Travellers. The findings of discussions with the EWO and school staff indicate that the EWS makes a positive contribution to assist traveller children to adjust to, and integrate well into, school. The EWO assists with uniform grant application transport to school, and access to social services. Notably, the EWO has been influential, in conjunction with SELB CASS officer, in securing the admission of a number of traveller children to primary and post-primary schools. There is however, the need for the EWS to be familiar with the specific attendance records of traveller children in order to develop an appropriate strategy to address and improve poor attendance, particularly among boys and following the transfer to post-primary school. Other EWOs provide support to traveller children who attend schools in their district, however, there are no formal arrangements to share or disseminate information and practice among EWOs. The survey findings indicate the need by the senior management of the service to specify the support provided to travellers and to form links with other services and agencies supporting this minority group.

8. **Accommodation and Resources**

- 8.1 The recent improvements to the office accommodation in Dungannon and Craigavon have enabled staff to provide a more professional service. The SELB should review accommodation in the remaining areas. The SELB should also initiate an analysis of the secretarial needs of EWO staff, to ensure, in particular, a point of contact during the day to all requests for information and advice.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 The EWS is led by a CEWO and SEWOs who have a clear perception of the way forward for the service and have worked hard to implement change in partnership with colleagues in the SELB and the schools. The strong commitment shown by staff to developing the service to meet the changing legislative context is commended. The EWS is well placed to implement the action set out in the EWS development plan.
- 9.2 A small number of areas have been identified by the survey team for development. These relate to: the completion of the review of the EWS and the need for continuing dialogue with the minority of schools not yet convinced of the changing role of the EWS; the need to review the arrangements to ensure that the staff are deployed effectively and can communicate with their base locations, particularly in difficult situations; the need to introduce an ICT support system; and the need to mediate the EWS more effectively through schools and other agencies.



The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) – The Role of The Education Welfare Service (EWS) in Relation to The Education of Looked After Children

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The term “looked after children” refers to children who are cared for by a Health and Social Services (HSS) Trust either under the terms of a Care Order, or accommodated under a voluntary agreement between the parents, or others with parental responsibility, and a HSS Trust. Research in recent years has found that in terms of educational attainment, looked after children do less well than other children, even those from comparable social, economic and family backgrounds. The Health Committee Report, “Children Looked After by Local Authorities” (House of Commons 1998, London: The Stationery Office), noted (Para 46) that:
- between 50% and 75% of school leavers who have been in care (care leavers) complete their schooling with no formal qualifications compared with only 6% of the general population;
 - between 12% and 19% of care leavers go on to further education compared with 68% of the general population;
 - between 50% and 80% of care leavers are unemployed;
 - one in ten 16-17 year old claimants of DSS severe hardship payments have been in care.
- 1.2 The poor educational achievement of looked after children has considerable implications for their future life chances and earning potential. The research findings have driven a range of initiatives in England to improve the educational outcomes of looked after children. Similarly, in Northern Ireland there is a growing interest in improving the educational outcomes of children who are looked after.
- 1.3 The area served by the SELB is not coterminous with the boundaries of the Southern Health and Social Services Board (SHSSB), as the Cookstown sector of Homefirst HSS Trust falls within its area. The CEWO does not, therefore, have information on the total number of children looked after within the SELB's area. Over the past nine months, however, the three SHSSB's HSS Trusts (Armagh and Dungannon, Craigavon and Banbridge, and Newry and Mourne) have provided details of each child when he/she commences, or ceases to be, looked after or when the child changes school.

1.4 In reaching its judgments, SSI took account of:

- discussion with the CEWO;
- discussion with EWOs, including the EWO currently seconded to work on the School Group Conferencing Project;
- discussion with the Children Order Team's Project Officer;
- attendance at the Education Focus Group, chaired by the Children Order Team Advisor, and consisting of representatives from the three HSS Trusts, Education Psychology Services and the CEWO;
- attendance at a meeting of the looked after children education group, which is a sub-committee of the NHSSB's Children and Young People's Committee at which the SELB's Children Order Team Advisor is a member;
- attendance at a School Group Conference;
- discussion with social services staff employed by HSS Trusts and the SHSSB.

2. **The Findings**

2.1 From discussion with staff, it is clear that there is an awareness of the needs of looked after children, and an interest in improving their educational opportunities and attainments. There is also a commitment to work in partnership with social services staff from the SHSSB and its three provider HSS Trusts (Armagh and Dungannon, Craigavon and Banbridge and Newry and Mourne). The CEWO is a member of the SHSSB's Education Focus Group, established to address the educational needs of children who experience a range of disadvantages. The education needs of looked after children form a significant component of the work undertaken by this group. The work of this group feeds into the SHSSB's Children's Services Planning process, which is required under the Children (1995 Order) (Amendment) (Children's Services Planning) Order (Northern Ireland) 1998.

2.2 Within the SELB, a Children Order Team (COT) was established in 1998 to assist with the implementation of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The aim of the COT is to provide early intervention with children, including those looked after by a HSS Trust, at stages 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice. The COT is accountable through an advisor to the Assistant Chief Education Officer, who also line manages the CEWO. An EWO is seconded to the COT. The only permanent member of the team is the advisor, the other members (two teachers and an EWO) are seconded. The CEWO has no responsibility for services to looked after children, as the COT advisor discharges these functions. These arrangements are unique to the SELB.

- 2.3 During 2001, the COT advisor undertook work to raise awareness in schools of the needs of looked after children. Awareness training has also been provided to residential and field social workers to increase their awareness of the educational system and of how to access appropriate help when a looked after child is experiencing difficulties.
- 2.4 There was a degree of confusion noted by respondents about the respective roles of the EWS and the COT in respect of looked after children. Some social workers stated that they would initially refer a child to the EWS, particularly as in their HSS Trust's area there is a designated EWO attached to the children's home, and this arrangement ensures consistency of approach. Some staff also noted that schools, at times, were unclear whether to refer a child to EWS or the COT and tended to use the service with which they were most familiar. In relation to attending the statutory review undertaken at least every six months in respect of looked after children, the interface between the EWS and the COT means that at times two staff from the SELB attend a child's review. Essentially, the EWO is invited to attend if he/she has an involvement with the child, while the COT advisor attends as the designated worker for looked after children. Despite some confusion regarding respective roles and functions and the potential for duplication, staff reported that both services were increasingly aware of the educational needs of looked after children.
- 2.5 The CEWO reported that the majority of referrals of looked after children were in respect of children who are either placed at home with parents under the terms of a care order or are living in residential settings. Fewer referrals are received for children who live with foster carers. The CEWO suspects that there is a higher level of looked after children who have a Statement of Educational Need (SEN). There are, however, no information processes in the SELB to enable any secure conclusion that looked after children are disproportionately represented among children who are statemented or suspended, or expelled, or among those in receipt of education through EOTAS AEP projects. The CEWO recognises that the education of looked after children is now afforded a higher profile. Given, however, the arrangements in the SELB, the CEWO noted that the EWS's role with looked after children is confined to casework with individual children, as the COT advisor has responsibility for looked after children as part of her role.
- 2.6 Within the SHSSB it is apparent that considerable work is currently underway to address the educational needs of looked after children, and a range of processes has been established to secure better outcomes for these children. Much of the work has involved HSS Trust staff linking directly with schools to establish the attainment levels of children. A proforma has also been devised to enable a regular review of children's performance at the review meeting for looked after children. Currently, there are no arrangements in place to share this information with either the CEWO or the COT advisor. Over the past year, however, all three

HSS Trusts have provided the CEWO with a notification when a child becomes, or ceases to be, looked after or when a looked after child changes placement. The CEWO is considering establishing a database to track looked after children and to answer questions regarding their degree of representation among children who are suspended or expelled from school. Effective communication of information across the education and social services sectors is necessary to ensure that relevant personnel have up-to-date information on looked after children's educational, social, emotional and physical well-being. Information exchange would also enable the EWS to provide additional support to a school with a high enrolment of looked after children or supply additional support to maintain looked after children within school settings.

- 2.7 According to EWS staff, there is a tendency for schools either to delay referral of children to the EWS, particularly noteworthy in the primary school sector, or to limit referrals to children with attendance-based problems. The past role of the EWO, in terms of securing children's attendance at school, has been slow to change in some schools. There is also a perception among some social work staff that enthusiasm about developing the EWO role away from that of attendance officer varied across EWOs. It was clearly articulated, however, that the EWS could form a bridge between schools and children's social environment and that better understanding and awareness of the role of social worker and teachers could be assured through the EWS acting as a link between both systems.
- 2.8 The need for earlier intervention to prevent the disengagement of children from the school/education system is recognised. The difficulty in re-integrating school children who are in residential care, or engaging them with alternative education provision, is considerable and suggests that greater focus needs to be afforded to preventing their suspension or expulsion. Common difficulties presented by children included their refusal to engage with any form of educational intervention and also problems finding a school willing to offer a place to a looked after child who is out of school. EWOs recognise that earlier intervention has greater prospect of success as it assists with preventing problems of attendance or behaviour becoming entrenched. The CEWO advises, however, that the current staffing level limits the opportunity for preventative working.
- 2.9 Respondents made a clear distinction between the needs of children in residential care as opposed to those living with foster carers. A range of respondents noted that the presence of a designated person, such as a foster carer, with whom they could liaise regarding a child's educational needs yielded a more focused approach and better outcomes for children. Residential staff regard the availability in one of the children's homes of a designated EWO, who was appointed last year, as a means of ensuring greater consistency and improving communication and co-ordination.

- 2.10 EWOs reported that they welcome the opportunity to be involved with children following the children's admission to care. This positive spirit was clearly evident at the School Group Conferencing Meeting when the interaction between the EWO, social worker, teachers and parent was well co-ordinated and ensured good communication and collaboration, amongst all those with a contribution to make, to improve the child's participation in school.
- 2.11 There is a growing recognition that children's social and emotional needs influence how they engage and attain in school settings. This is particularly true of looked after children. Effective interfaces between the public care system and schools are, therefore, vital if the needs of looked after children are to be addressed. There was a sense throughout this survey that EWS and social services staff were aware that improved inter-agency and partnership working is required in the interests of greater effectiveness, and benefits to the children.

3. **Conclusion and Recommendations**

- 3.1 Educationally as a group, looked after children attain less well than their peers who are not looked after. While many of these children have no behavioural or attendance problems within school, some pose considerable challenges to teaching staff. Teachers' awareness and understanding of the needs of looked after children, are critical if these children are to be assisted to meet their potential within the school system. While there is currently no data to substantiate the view that looked after children are disproportionately represented among children attending EOTAS AEP provision, or in receipt of tuition services, "statemented", or suspended or expelled from school, this was the perception of many staff. The EWS is well placed to provide a link between social services and the education systems to the benefit of looked after children.
- 3.2 In the SELB, the EWS has been afforded limited opportunity to work with looked after children other than at individual casework levels, given the establishment of the COT and its responsibilities for this group of children. The existing structure has the potential to act as a barrier to work which is currently ongoing to enhance the professional role of the EWO. An approach predicated on earlier intervention, and raising awareness across professions and agencies of the respective role of both social workers (fieldwork and residential) and teachers, requires a consistent group of staff with the knowledge and professional background to liaise effectively between social services and the education sector. Some confusion now exists regarding the respective roles of the EWS and the COT. The resulting potential for duplication and overlap suggests that there would be benefit in considering how best to build on the strengths of both services through improved co-ordinated management arrangements.
- 3.3 Comments from social services colleagues indicate that there are generally good working relationships between EWOs and social services staff. At times, however, there was a wish for better understanding of one another's roles and

responsibilities, particularly in relation to the acquisition of a school place for children who were not enrolled with any school.

3.4 To assist with developing the EWS further the following recommendations are made:

1. The CEWO together with the SELB should seek to review the existing arrangements for the delivery of the COT's services, with a view to streamlining arrangements, to improve awareness of their respective roles and responsibilities, and to begin a discussion regarding the future role of the EWS for looked after children.
2. The CEWO and the SELB should review the practice of using EWO secondees to staff the Children Order Team as current arrangements do not provide the continuity of staff necessary for the promotion of effective working relationships and communications across agencies and professions.
3. The CEWO should seek to have staffing levels within the EWS service reviewed by the SELB to ensure that priority is afforded to preventative work with looked after children, targeted at reducing the number of them who are suspended or expelled from school, or who leave school without qualifications.
4. In co-operation with the SHSSB, the CEWO should seek to establish a database of all looked after children to enable an analysis of their representation within the groups of children suspended, or expelled from school, or attending EOTAS AEP, or statemented, or leaving school without a qualification; this data should be used to identify and deliver on a co-ordinated basis any necessary remedial action.

A Report of a Survey of The Education Welfare Service in The South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB)

1. Introduction

The Chief Education Welfare Officer (CEWO) and six Senior Education Welfare Officers (SEWOs) manage the South Eastern Education and Library Board's Education Welfare Service (EWS). The SEWOs have responsibility for four divisional teams designated as the Mid-Down team, the North-Down team, the Lisburn team and the Belfast Fringe team. Two SEWOs have responsibility for special educational needs and behaviour support provision within the SEELB. The EWS has a complement of 24 officers. In addition, one full-time and four part-time administrative staff provide valuable support to the EWO teams.

- 1.2 The SEELB's EWS focuses on promoting school attendance for pupils who may be referred to the service for a variety of reasons, including suspension/expulsion, social or emotional difficulties and behavioural problems. In relation to their work in schools, the EWS supports parents, pupils, school staff and other professionals to ensure that young people are offered the best possible opportunities to engage with school. The EWS also works preventatively to promote and monitor attendance through the use of projects and a variety of support programmes for pupils and their families.
- 1.3 The EWS has recently been awarded Charter Mark status following concentrated efforts by the service to promote consistent practices of a high standard. The survey team welcomes the EWS's efforts to achieve Charter Mark success and acknowledges the good standards achieved across the EWS divisions.

2. Management of The Service

- 2.1 The CEWO manages the EWS and reports directly to an Assistant Senior Education Officer within the SEELB Education Department. She has been in post for the last ten years and in response to changes in legislation she recently has initiated significant management changes to the way the EWS is run. Chief among these has been the production of the EWS service level agreements and the successful charter mark application which has raised the profile of the service. Along with the CEWOs from the other ELBs, she has been involved in the EWS Working Party, set up in July 2001, to identify a number of strategic and developmental goals for the EWS and to begin the debate on the future focus of EWO work.
- 2.2 One of the CEWO's main responsibilities is to act as the SEELB's Designated Child Protection Officer. This duty takes up a significant amount of time and detracts from other management duties. It is noted that the SEELB has recently reviewed child protection responsibilities and has created an additional senior post with responsibility for child protection. The survey team finds this action appropriate.

- 2.3 The CEWO provides very good leadership and has established effective management arrangements that promote a sense of teamwork and collaboration. The evident dedication of the CEWO is central to the work of the service and sets a high standard and expectation to all. The management and administration of the EWS are effective, proficient and well-organised, and are detailed in a comprehensive service handbook. The regular management meetings are businesslike, well-organised, agreeable and productive. The SEWOs provide a sense of direction and purpose to the service and actively encourage the contribution of all EWOs; for example, the planning and development work for the successful Charter Mark application was led by a small team of EWOs which was supported and encouraged by staff at senior management level. Another example of team working is the professional help and written documentation available for recently appointed EWOs to assist their judgements and recommendations.
- 2.4 The EWS liaises effectively with the Assistant Senior Education Officer and there is a shared understanding of the needs and priorities of the EWS. The quality of the working relationships between the senior SEELB officers and the CEWO is a feature of the management of the service and it is evident that the work of the CEWO is highly regarded by the senior officers of the SEELB.
- 2.5 The SEWOs work hard and have established a range of local provision to promote attendance. They make good efforts to inform parents and schools of their work and have produced colourful leaflets to raise the awareness of the EWS provision and provide useful information about access to the provision. In order to ensure that parents are more aware of the service, it is recommended that schools and other points of contact are encouraged to display at accessible points in their buildings the range of information produced by the EWS in relation to the Charter Mark.
- 2.6 In a number of instances, the divisional teams' work is impressive, particularly the contribution the EWS makes to the front line work with schools and agencies such as the South East Belfast Children's Panel which is a multi-agency partnership aimed at identifying young people at risk of offending and offering them and their families packages of support. Much of the work of the EWS is delivered through its involvement in such projects and inter-agency work aimed at meeting the needs of pupils at risk of dropping out of school or becoming poor attenders.
- 2.7 Individual EWOs with responsibility for the core business of school support work and home visits carry out their duties conscientiously, and with due sensitivity for, and commitment to, the individual needs of the pupils. There is evidence that the EWOs' work is well regarded throughout the school system.

3. **Ethos**

3.1 The CEWO and SEWOs have achieved much in developing a positive ethos through good communication and partnership in which staff within the EWS co-operate effectively with colleagues in schools, the Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS) and other SEELB services. The EWS has a clear vision of the future based on sound professional principles and effective procedures, and is supported by a team which brings significant skill and experience to the work. The sessions observed demonstrated good quality relationships between the EWOs and the schools, parents and children. The survey confirms the current practices as effective and efficient and notes the assured and constructive ethos within the EWS.

3.2 A number of factors contribute to the sound quality of the ethos. These include:

- the clear service handbook and Charter Mark materials which provide information and consistent guidance on the EWOs' links with schools and parents;
- the effective multi-disciplinary links with other professionals outside education, in particular, the sound partnership with Down and Lisburn Trust;
- the effective working partnership with the schools as demonstrated by the EWOs' sound knowledge of the social environment of the schools and good working relationships with many of the families visited;

4. **School/Parental Satisfaction Outcomes**

4.1 A member of survey team attended the parents' meeting. The outcomes of the meeting revealed a genuine sense of respect for the work of the EWOs and the EWS approach. Many of the parents expressed appreciation for the support they received and the efforts made to re-engage their child in school. The main points expressed were:

- the parents valued the professional attitude of the EWS staff and the respect shown them as parents;
- the short length of time between referral and initial contact which was seen to be very helpful;
- the EWOs' continued attempts to encourage the young people to manage their own behaviours;
- the quality of the home visits and the friendly manner in which interviews were conducted;

- the view that schools did not publicise the breadth of the work of the EWS sufficiently;
- the view of many that the EWO did more than could have been expected.

4.2 The school satisfaction survey was carried out by members of the survey team who visited eight schools. The main findings suggested that the EWS is regarded highly by the majority of schools; most schools expressed their appreciation both of the manner in which the EWOs dealt with parents and of the range of activities available from the service. Individual EWOs integrated well into school routines, including meetings and at INSET days. The schools noted that the EWO is regarded in many instances as a pupil advocate who provides a collaborative and cohesive link with the other statutory agencies. The schools additionally believed that the EWS should be publicised more openly to ensure that all schools were aware fully of the range of support the EWS had to offer.

5. **Working Practices of The Education Welfare Officers**

5.1 The survey team observed the EWO engaged in a variety of working settings and routine activities. In summary, the work observed was always of a good or better standard and was characterized by a number of important features including:

- the positive ethos promoted throughout;
- the clear focus of the work undertaken;
- the emphasis on the well-being of the pupils;
- the good links with other agencies, such as the youth service and the social services.

5.2 The EWOs are familiar with the welfare system and its contribution to the education process. Close links with other professionals provide a wide network of contacts to support young people. Staff meetings and training days offer a forum for discussion and debate, and help to ensure that all are well informed of developments in the EWS. One recent forum, for example, organised by the SEELB, of officers of the EWS, CASS and other SEELB services provided a useful opportunity to inform a wide range of SEELB staff of the changing role of the EWS. The CEWO gave an excellent overview which included the challenges for the EWS in developing provision for looked after children.

5.3 The arrangements in place to guide the staff in relation to child protection and personal safety issues and working practices are well established and operate effectively. The service is currently contributing to a five-board review of DE circular 1999/10 in respect of pastoral care including child protection.

5.4 The arrangements for staff deployment provide opportunities for individual members of staff to gain experience in a range of activities including project

work. This is a useful practice which ensures that staff become familiar with, gain experience of, and contribute more effectively to, core and preventative work.

- 5.5 The EWS has developed a system of staff development which allows staff to have a voice in the development of the service and to enhance their individual professional skills. Supervision meetings and the annual appraisal process keep the senior management aware of the quality of practice across the EWS and indicate priority needs for action at staff meetings and training days. The recently established training and development initiative, set up under the guidance of the CEWO, extends responsibility for INSET and encourages discussion regarding new initiatives.
- 5.6 The SEELB has not invested in an electronic system to support the EWS work. This area should be prioritised for improvement with the aim of integrating new technology across the five ELB services.

6. **Professional Development Induction Programme**

- 6.1 The induction and INSET programme is of good quality. Considerable thought has been given to prioritising topics for attention and much of the work reflects the demands made of the EWS by the various DE circulars and by the need to familiarise new staff with the aims and objectives of the SEELB and the EWS. A useful induction package has been prepared by a team of EWOs which contains comprehensive information, alongside a valuable historical background to the EWS explaining relevant legislation, policy and the working processes of individual officers. An induction checklist and evaluation sheet usefully allows the EWS management to refine constantly the induction process.
- 6.2 In discussion with the CEWO and SEWOs, it is clear that the issue of professional qualifications gives rise to considerable debate ranging from an agreed belief that the social work qualification enhances the status and the quality of the EWS and including genuine feelings of concern that the criteria for the EWO position may prevent the service from attracting other professions with contributing experiences. The issue needs further consideration at a senior level within and across the ELBs.

7. **Involvement With Projects, Programmes and Partnership Committees**

- 7.1 The variety and quality of work in this developing area are good and include a range of long established and more recently developed initiatives designed to prevent attendance becoming a barrier to progress in education. Projects include:
- the Down Adolescent Partnership;
 - the Looked after Children Partnership Down and Lisburn Trust;

- the Juvenile Liaison Bureau Project;
- the Restart Programme at Down and Ards College;
- the Primary Schools Attendance Initiative;
- the support provision for special needs summer schemes;
- the pastoral care initiatives;
- the support work in Lakewood Centre;
- the support for school leavers at Killard House Special School;
- the School Aged Mothers project;
- the Education Other Than At School support;
- the SEWO contribution to behaviour support team meetings;
- the Promoting and Sustaining Good Behaviour initiative at De La Salle High School;
- the mentoring project at Lisburn.

8. **Accommodation and Resources**

- 8.1 Accommodation is generally adequate and staff appreciate the recently allocated additional secretarial and administrative support. It will be important to ensure that facilities are developed for individual EWOs to meet in private with parents or pupils, and for telephone conversations to be taken with discretion when the need arises.

9. **Conclusion**

- 9.1 The EWS benefits greatly from the clear vision and very good leadership provided by the CEWO and her senior officers. Staff relationships are positive and a strong sense of teamwork is evident. The EWS is efficiently and effectively managed. Pupils, parents and schools are well-supported. Sound developmental preventative work is undertaken sensibly to support the core business of the EWS. A small number of areas for improvement have been identified, including: the need to mediate the EWS more effectively through schools and other agencies; the need to extend and develop the debate on the future forms of EWO work; the need to review arrangements for communication between EWOs and their headquarters; and the need to develop an ICT support system.

The South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) – The Role of The Education Welfare Service (EWS) in Relation to The Education of Looked After Children

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The term “looked after children” refers to children who are cared for by a Health and Social Services (HSS) Trust either under the terms of a Care Order, or accommodated under a voluntary agreement between the parents, or others with parental responsibility, and a HSS Trust. Research in recent years has found that in terms of educational attainment, looked after children do less well than other children, even those from comparable social, economic and family backgrounds. The Health Committee Report, “Children Looked After by Local Authorities” (House of Commons 1998, London: The Stationery Office), noted (Para 46) that:
- between 50% and 75% of school leavers who have been in care (care leavers) complete their schooling with no formal qualifications compared with only 6% of the general population;
 - between 12% and 19% of care leavers go on to further education compared with 68% of the general population;
 - between 50% and 80% of care leavers are unemployed;
 - one in ten 16-17 year old claimants of DSS severe hardship payments have been in care.
- 1.2 The poor educational achievement of looked after children has considerable implications for their future life chances and earning potential. The research findings have driven a range of initiatives in England to improve the educational outcomes of looked after children. Similarly, in Northern Ireland there is a growing interest in improving the educational outcomes of children who are looked after.
- 1.3 The area served by the SEELB is not co-terminous with the boundaries of the Eastern Health and Social Services Board (EHSSB), which is the commissioning HSS Board for four Health and Social Services (HSS) Trusts (Down Lisburn, North and West Belfast, South and East Belfast and Ulster Community Hospitals). SEELB covers the area served by Down Lisburn HSS Trust, the part of S&E Belfast HSS Trust, which falls within Castlereagh Council's boundary and the Ulster Community Hospitals Trust. The fact that the EWS operates across three Trust areas creates the potential for different approaches/responses to common issues because of variation in practice or priorities across HSS Trusts.

1.4 In reaching its judgments, SSI took into consideration:

- discussion with the CEWO;
- attendance at a sub-group of the Looked After Children EHSSB's Children and Young People's Committee;
- attendance at an operational sub-group on Looked After Children, which is tasked with devising protocols to inform referrals between social services and the EWS;
- discussion with the Looked After Children Project Officer;
- the Information Resource Pack (To raise the Educational Achievement of Children and Young People who are Looked After), November 2001;
- discussion with EWOs and HSS Board and Trusts staff.

2. **The Findings**

- 2.1 Awareness of the educational needs of looked after children is evident from discussion with both EWS and social services staff. Currently, the CEWO is not aware of how many looked after children are the responsibility of the SEELB as notification is only received from one sector of the Down Lisburn HSS Trust when a child commences, or ceases, to be looked after. An audit of the looked after children within the SEELB area is an essential first stage in planning future services targeted on improving their educational outcomes. To this end, work has commenced to identify looked after children within the EHSSB's area, the schools they attend and the level of their attainment. This audit was led by an Information Research Officer employed by the EHSSB. Due to staff changes within the EHSSB, the audit has been delayed.
- 2.2 There is a commitment within the EWS to work in partnership with social services staff from both the EHSSB and its relevant HSS Trusts. The CEWO noted variations in working relationship across the three HSS Trusts. At Chief Executive levels in the SEELB and Down Lisburn HSS Trusts there are good working relationships which are mirrored at other levels within the two organisations. Work is now progressing to develop similar co-operative working approaches within the two other HSS Trusts. The practical outworking of the good working relationship between Down Lisburn HSS Trust and the EWS is the joint funding of a Project Officer for Looked After Children, who has developed an information resource pack. The resource pack for carers and educators is designed to provide guidance and advice to individuals working with or caring for looked after children. The resource pack arose out of the realisation that many foster carers, and professionals in schools, and those working in children's homes did not have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the roles of others. The resource pack, by providing clear and concise guidance for teachers, carers and young people on all aspects of education, seeks to improve understanding

across the education and social services sectors. This work is innovative and was led by a Project Officer who was seconded from the EWS to undertake this work. Down Lisburn HSS Trust and the SEELB jointly fund the post. Both agencies and the Project Worker are commended for their vision in taking this work forward. The Project Worker has an ongoing role with looked after children as a member of the two sub-groups; she is presently working to develop referral protocols and PEPs for looked after children. The aim is that each looked after child will have a PEP. Initially, emphasis will be given to developing a PEP for children in residential care as their links with education are generally not as well established as for their peers in foster care.

- 2.3 The need for better communication of information across the education and social services sectors to ensure that relevant EWS personnel know about children who are looked after is recognised. Information exchange would enable the EWS either to provide additional support to a school with a high enrolment of looked after children or supply additional support to maintain looked after children within school settings. Within the EWS there is a view that social services staff perceive their role as finding a school for children who are out of school, ensuring children's attendance at school, or making alternative education provision for children who are out of mainstream education. Alongside this is the pressure on schools to relocate children who pose management difficulties for staff. In an effort to raise awareness of the role of the EWS a short video has been made which sets out the work which is undertaken by EWOs and includes work with: school aged mothers, looked after children and addressing children's behaviours. The CEWO noted that a looked after child made an input to the video, which was particularly useful in raising awareness of the specific needs of such children. The CEWO's intention is to use this video in teacher training as a means of improving teachers' awareness of the needs of looked after children and also their understanding of the potential role of the EWS.
- 2.4 The only service that is specific to looked after children is that provided through the Project Officer post. The Project Officer has undertaken awareness training with foster carers to enable them to liaise more appropriately with schools in respect of the children whom they foster. The CEWO would like to see this role extended into the other two HSS Trusts' areas. SEELB also provides a part-time EWO to the secure units based at Lakewood Centre (Bangor) to liaise with ELBs across Northern Ireland to facilitate children's access to education services on their discharge from secure accommodation. There is a low rate of success in acquiring education for children on their discharge and the CEWO believes there is a need to commence the process of negotiations with receiving ELBs as soon as possible to ensure services are available when the child returns to his/her home area.
- 2.5 Looked after children live in a range of placements such as with their family under the terms of a Care Order, or with foster carers, or in children's homes.

Seldom are children in foster care referred to the EWS. Generally, such referrals occur at the point of a fostering breakdown when the child is being admitted to residential care or when, as older adolescents, they are refusing to engage with school and are, as a consequence, placing pressure on the foster care placements. EWOs report that much of their work in respect of looked after children is focused on children in residential care. This group of children often presents considerable challenges in terms of engaging/re-engaging them with education services. The difficulty in re-integrating these children into school or engaging them with alternative education provision is considerable and suggests that greater focus needs to be afforded to preventing these children from being suspended or expelled from school.

- 2.6 The CEWO wishes to see the EWO and residential social workers work together when a looked after child is out of school. She accepts the need to cut down agency boundaries and to adopt partnership working approaches so that the responsibility is not perceived as being with one worker or another but rather that it requires commitment from all parties to effect the successful re-integration of the child into school. The complaint from schools is that there is an absence of a consistent figure within children's homes with whom they can liaise when a child is experiencing difficulties. Conversely, social workers at times find it difficult to negotiate the education system, particularly when statementing or suspension procedures are being implemented. There are potential benefits in appointing dedicated staff within schools and children's homes to facilitate communication and the exchange of information. The EWO role, however, can serve as a bridge between the social and school environments of looked after children.
- 2.7 Within the SEELB, the bulk of referrals for EOTAS AEP projects are channelled through the EWS, which acts as a gatekeeper to these services. The CEWO is not aware if looked after children are over-represented in the group of children who are educated outside mainstream education.
- 2.8 Earlier intervention with children is necessary if the EWS is to effect change. Referrals to the EWS are generally of children aged 14+ years, who may already have developed entrenched problems either regarding school attendance or behaviours within school. The nature of referrals for EWS is seen as a function of the past pre-occupation with the secondary schools sector. According to EWS staff, there is a tendency for primary schools to delay referral of children, or for schools across the primary and post-primary sectors to limit referrals to children with attendance-based problems. EWOs recognise that earlier intervention has greater prospect of success as it prevents problems of attendance or behaviour becoming entrenched. Earlier identification of children with school-based difficulties would enable the EWS to make appropriate referrals to HSS Trusts and could reduce the need for children to become looked after in the future. The CEWO advises that work is currently underway to re-profile the EWS so that

interventions are targeted more at the primary school sector and are characterized more strongly by preventative approaches. This shift of focus will, however, take time and sensitivity to implement in practice.

- 2.9 A number of social services respondents outlined the potential to develop the professional social work role of the EWO through developing their individual casework and group work inputs within the school settings. There was a view that some EWOs were more willing to embrace a changed role for the future than others. The potential for the EWS to be used more fully by social services to improve children's access to and achievement in education was noted by social services staff. The potential of earlier identification of school-based difficulties, more preventative approaches and working supportively with parents were all approaches which social services staff saw as beneficial to the re-profiling of the EWS.
- 2.10 Some highly complimentary comments were received regarding the quality of partnership working between EWOs and social workers and there is a clear recognition of the potential of the services to improve communication and information exchange between social services and schools. The awareness raising work, which the Project Officer has undertaken, is seen as a means of facilitating looked after children's access to education. Other HSS Trusts within the SEELB would wish to develop this model of working as funding permits.

3. **Conclusion and Recommendations**

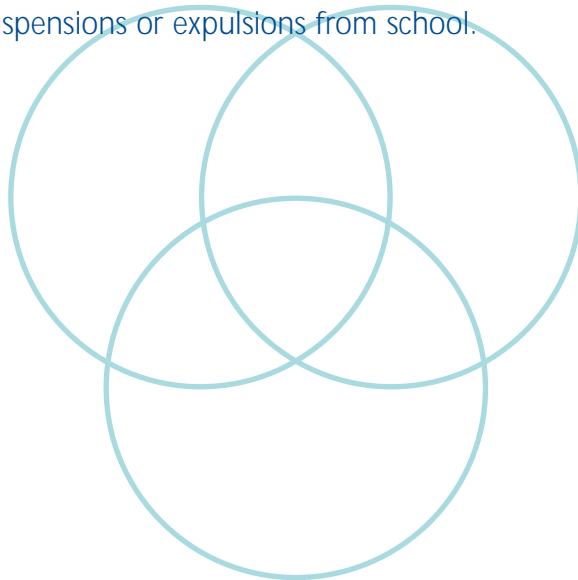
- 3.1 Educationally as a group, looked after children attain less well than their peers who are not looked after. While many looked after children have no behavioural or attendance problems within school, some pose considerable challenges to the teaching staff. It is essential that teachers are aware of and understand the needs of looked after children so that these children can be assisted effectively to meet their potential within the school system. While there is currently no data to substantiate the view that looked after children are disproportionately represented among children attending EOTAS AEP provision, or in receipt of tuition services, or suspended or expelled from school, this was the perception of many social services and EWS staff. The EWS is well placed to provide a link between social services and the education systems to the benefit of looked after children. There was evidence of a recognition within the EWS of the need to work with looked after children, at an earlier stage than is currently possible, to prevent their removal from school. There is also recognition of the need to work with schools to raise the awareness of staff to the needs of looked after children. There was clear evidence that the EWS wished to develop a more professional role than that which it perceived others had of it, namely of being attendance officers.
- 3.2 The joint appointment and funding of a Project Officer for looked after children by Down Lisburn HSS Trust and the EWS demonstrates the increasing priority

being afforded to improving the educational outcomes of these children. It is, however, essential that the audit of the educational needs of looked after children is completed and that an exchange of information is developed between HSS Trusts and the EWS in respect of looked after children to ensure that appropriate support can be provided, as necessary, to the child and/or the school. The production of a video to increase awareness of the role of the EWS is commended and its use in teacher training and the training of field and residential social workers and foster carers should also be considered. The CEWO has to work across three HSS Trusts, each of which operates in different ways in relation to looked after children. The partnership model of working developed between the EWS and Down Lisburn HSS Trust has much to commend it, as has the action of the SEELB in respect of seeking to create similar approaches with the other two HSS Trusts. Comments from social services colleagues generally indicated good working relationships between EWOs and social services staff. There were, however, some suggestions relating to the need for the EWS to define better its role, to develop further its professional contribution within the education system and to focus more on preventative approaches at an earlier stage.

3.3 To assist with developing the EWS further the following recommendations are made.

1. The CEWO should pursue with the EHSSB the completion of the audit of looked after children to enable the establishment of a database.
2. The CEWO should liaise with managers from Down Lisburn HSS Trust, S&E Belfast HSS Trust and Ulster Community Hospitals Trust to develop an information system that would ensure that the EWS is notified by the Trusts whenever a child begins, or ceases, to be looked after, or changes school. The information provided should include details relating to the child's educational needs which could inform the work which the EWS provides to facilitate the child's ongoing education. This information would enable a database to be kept up-to-date.
3. The CEWO should consider improving awareness of the EWS's role by using the video in the training of teachers, field and residential social workers and foster carers.
4. The staffing level within the EWS should be reviewed by the SEELB to ensure that there are adequate resources to work preventatively with looked after children to reduce the potential for them to be suspended or expelled from school.
5. The CEWO should take steps to acquire funding for the post of Project Officer for looked after children and seek to develop this service across the three HSS Trusts served by the SEELB to co-ordinate better intervention with looked after children.

6. The CEWO should review the protocols established between the EWO based at Lakewood Centre and ELBs across Northern Ireland to improve communication and to enhance the level of re-engagement of children with education following their discharge from secure accommodation.
7. The CEWO should liaise with the EHSSB and the three HSS Trusts to ensure that the approaches being developed within the EWS in relation to developing protocols to inform referral processes and PEPs are taken forward in a joint manner to ensure the successful implementation of these positive approaches.
8. The CEWO should collate information on an annual basis to assess if looked after children are disproportionately represented in the following areas:
 - referrals to, or attendance at, alternative educational programmes;
 - suspensions or expulsions from school.



A Report of a Survey of The Education Welfare Service in The Western Education and Library Board (WELB)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The WELB's Education Welfare Service (EWS) responds to referrals from schools, parents and other agencies with regard to attendance, suspension/expulsion and to social/emotional and behavioural difficulties that are impinging upon a pupil's right to full-time education. The EWS is placed within the WELB's 'Pupil Services' Department under the management of an Assistant Senior Education Officer.
- 1.2 The EWS has a complement of 27 full-time officers and at the time of the survey there was one vacancy.

2. Management of The Service

- 2.1 The EWS is managed effectively by the Chief Education Welfare Officer (CEWO) supported by six Senior Education Welfare Officers (SEWO), five of whom have responsibility for divisional offices within the WELB, based in Omagh, Enniskillen, Strabane, Derry South and Derry North. One of the SEWOs leads the EWS' Project Team which specialises in particular projects such as the School Group Conferencing project and the School Age Mothers project. The CEWO provides dedicated and committed leadership and, in the last ten years, has overseen and guided the EWS in its transition from a sole focus on attendance, to its present wide-ranging role of supporting schools, pupils and parents on educational welfare issues.
- 2.2 Unlike the practice in the other four ELBs, the CEWO is not the designated officer for Child Protection but holds the post of deputy designated officer. The time spent on child protection issues fluctuates but, on average, takes up approximately 20% of his duties. This arrangement works well, allowing the CEWO to devote his time to effective management of the EWS while still retaining close contact with the child protection issues as they arise.
- 2.3 The EWS is organised in area teams, under the management of the SEWOs who are effective in managing the EWS within their own areas and have a detailed and thorough knowledge of the schools and the education welfare issues. As part of their duties, SEWOs review annually the Service Level Agreements (SLA) with their schools and negotiate any adjustments that need to be made. The SEWOs bring maturity, experience and sound leadership to their roles in managing the service; they have developed harmonious working relationships within their teams and fostered positive links with schools, parents and the pupils. There are many examples of excellent inter-agency working in which the SEWOs take a leading role in establishing and maintaining professional relationships with a wide range of disciplines. A particularly good example is the work of the Juvenile Liaison Bureau in which the SEWO takes a leading role and

participates in an intervention strategy designed to identify alternatives to court action for young people who have come before the law.

- 2.4 The service maintains records of the referrals made during the year and is actively engaged in a review of its priorities in light of the findings made.

Provisionally, the figures for the last year reveal the following information:

Number of cases referred to EWS	2344
Number of cases closed successfully	1165
Number of cases closed due to pupil reaching leaving age	905
Number of visits made to schools	1178 (estimate)
Number of visits made to homes	5880 (estimate)
2000/2001: % school attendance	
i. primary	95.5%
ii. post-primary	90.9%
EWOs time spent in	
i. primary schools	- 20% (estimate)
ii. post-primary schools	- 65% (estimate)
iii. special schools	- 10% (estimate)
iv. grammar schools	- 5% (estimate)

The evidence from the figures supplied suggests that the EWS should devise a method of recording the data accurately so that trends can be identified and strategic planning developed to focus on the referral needs of the schools, parents and pupils.

- 2.5 The EWS is placed strategically within the WELB's Special Education Division. The business plan for 2001/2002 clearly identifies priorities for action for the EWS within the division and sets out goals for implementation within an agreed time frame. Initiatives such as the development of the project for School Age Mothers (SAM) and a pilot project to provide support to parents of children at risk, are

clearly identified within the plan. Three major areas for action are also identified which demonstrate clearly the future direction of the EWS and re-emphasise its stated core aims. These priorities include:

- the need to consult further with schools in the post-primary sector on the effective use of the referral system through SLAs;
- the need to target post-primary schools below the Northern Ireland average for school attendance and plan intervention strategies at an appropriate level to reduce unauthorised absences;
- the need to prioritise referred cases that indicate an attendance level of 85% or below.

2.6 Sound business plans for each of the area EWS teams have also been drawn up under the guidance of the SEWOs. The aims and objectives are closely linked to the overall service business plan and provide details of how the performance targets are to be met. Within these business plans, for 2001/2002, details are given of practical ways in which the priorities stated have been achieved and, how the performance measures identified, have been successfully implemented. The business plan for the project team sets out clear objectives for the development of project work up to June 2003. Priorities for action include:

- the development of the SAM project to cover all school age mothers in the WELB's area;
- the development of parenting support programmes throughout the WELB;
- consultation with service users regarding their views on EWS;
- the development, by June 2002, of an induction package for the EWS.

3. **Ethos**

3.1 The officers of the EWS are professional and dedicated to their work. They are fully informed on all aspects of the law on child protection which relate to their work. They keep records of all aspects of their work. The work seldom shows immediate results, and the patience and tenacity shown throughout the variety of experiences observed, are commended. The EWOs demonstrate a deep understanding of the problems facing the pupils, and a strong understanding of the background and the influences surrounding the problems. Whilst sensitivity is always a priority in all the work observed, there remains a clear focus on the pupils' welfare.

3.2 The relationships are excellent between the EWOs and the schools, parents and children with whom they work. Within the service itself there is a strong sense of teamwork, and harmonious working relationships are evident.

4. School/Parental Satisfaction Outcomes

4.1 The main findings of the school satisfaction survey were as follows:

- a majority of schools had a named EWO and all reported good working relationship;
- the schools visited were aware of, and were positive towards, the changing role of the EWS, and had confidence in the work of the service;
- the majority of schools disseminated the outcomes of the EWO's work through the principal or a senior member of staff;
- all schools used information from the Computerised Local Administration for Schools (CLASS) system to identify pupils in need of referral to the service;
- a minority of schools requested the EWS to provide INSET courses related, for example, to the role of service, anger management, positive discipline;
- all schools reported a good response time following a request for assistance from the EWS and a majority of the schools used the service for truancy, behavioural issues and general child support as well as attendance; a small number of schools used the EWS for projects such as parenting courses, anger management etc;
- although all schools felt the EWS had made a positive impact on the family, the school and the individual pupils, there was no formal approach to monitoring the impact except through review meetings. The majority of schools felt that the EWS was not fully successful in dealing with the attendance and truancy problems of a small core of pupils;
- some schools felt that the legal system had not been used as often as it should have been, while a small minority of schools complained that the frequency of change of EWOs had a detrimental effect;
- a small minority of schools were aware of the facilities/workings of the Family Proceedings Court. All schools had a small percentage of looked after children on roll;
- all schools referred to the EWS all children with attendance of less than 85% except those who had long term illness or on agreed holidays. The majority of schools made, or preferred to make, the initial contact to Social Services themselves, rather than through the EWS;

- a small minority of schools were unaware of the wide range of services provided by the EWS, though a wide variety of strategies and incentives for good attendance was in evidence across a range of schools; many of these involved close partnership with the EWO;
- a minority of schools had developed a formal contract with parents, pupils, the EWO and teachers, regarding their responsibilities for ensuring good behaviour and attendance; all of these schools felt the input of the EWO was very important.

Overall, the schools had a very positive image of the EWS and were keen to work in partnership with individual officers on the core work of home visits and on the project approach.

4.2 The meeting between the parents and the associate assessor revealed the following points:

- all parents who spoke at the meeting made positive comments about the involvement of the EWS in helping their children overcome a variety of problems;
- the majority of parents felt the EWS had helped their children return to school following truancy, refusal to attend or because of bullying;
- the majority of parents felt it was helpful to have someone not attached to the school to act as a liaison person;
- the school usually made the initial contact when there was a problem with attendance;
- the initial contact by the EWS was made either by telephone or personal visit to the home;
- the majority of parents felt that the aims and objectives of the EWS were adequately explained at the initial meeting;
- the majority of parents felt that the EWO was willing to listen fairly to the parents and the school when any dispute arose;
- requests for help from parents with regard to non-attendance were normally responded to quickly and many parents had been contacted within two to three days;
- a small minority of parents felt strongly that the EWS did not take a robust enough stance with persistent non-attendance and anti-social behaviour; these parents wished to see court action being taken;
- most parents were happy with the frequency of support given; usually the pupil was seen weekly or fortnightly by the EWO either at home or in school;

- a small minority of parents were unhappy at the level of support when their child was being bullied at school or refusing to attend;
- the majority of parents felt that the schools co-operated extremely well with the parents and the EWS to bring cases to a satisfactory conclusion;
- all parents gave examples of a range of support offered eg developing parental skills, anger management for children, arranging respite care, putting families in touch with befrienders;
- most parents felt there were long-term benefits for their families from the EWS's support.

5. Working Practices of The Education Welfare Officers

- 5.1 The working practices of the EWS have evolved as a result of the implementation of the Children Order (1995) which empowered Education and Library Boards to apply for Education Supervision Orders (ESO) in respect of young people who are not receiving appropriate education as defined by the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. The immediate implication of this change in legislation was to remove the Training School Orders in respect of young people failing to attend school. Problems relating to school attendance were no longer the responsibility of social services but came under the remit of the EWS.
- 5.2 The EWOs have received substantial training regarding the Children Order legislation and have been made aware of the need to engage parents and children in meaningful and focused voluntary agreements before considering legal proceedings. The following staged approach has been adopted by the EWS as a result of the introduction of the Children Order and underpins the development of the multi-layered and partnership philosophy that guides current practice:
- Family Meetings – where an agreement or plan of work is developed between the EWS, the parent and child;
 - Education Planning Meetings-where an agreement or plan of work is developed in partnership with other interested professionals eg social services, probation etc;
 - Family Proceedings Court - where the EWS applies for an Education Supervision Order (ESO) placing the child under the supervision of an EWO.
- 5.3 Two of the EWOs in the WELB service are practice teachers with responsibility, in conjunction with the University of Ulster, for managing the placement of students studying for their social work degrees. It is evident that these officers bring a great degree of commitment and expertise to their role in supporting students and that the students themselves are benefiting from the high quality of the support provided. Interviews with the students revealed their satisfaction

with the range of experiences provided during their EWS placement; all were complimentary about the role of the practice teachers and the quality of the professional advice provided.

6. Professional Development/Induction Programme

6.1 The induction programme for newly appointed EWOs has just been developed and is due to be implemented in the near future.

6.2 Scrutiny of the professional qualifications of EWOs reveals a highly qualified workforce in which further in-service courses are prioritised. Officers have participated in a wide range of courses, all of which have relevance to their work in supporting schools, families and pupils with managing attendance and other associated education welfare issues. Examples of in-services courses attended include:

- school age mothers' research;
- young people and drugs;
- matching needs and services regarding looked after children;
- positive behaviour management;
- suicide awareness;
- parenting facilitators training;
- the needs of traveller children;
- anger management training;
- pastoral care in schools.

7. Involvement with Projects, Programmes and Partnership Committees

7.1 Over time, the EWS has evolved a range of strategies which have been innovative and imaginative in addressing attendance and welfare issues affecting schools and children. A number of effective initiatives were observed during the survey and these have been successful in re-engaging disaffected young people with education through a range of alternative education projects (AEP). Some of the most impressive work observed included the following:

i. The Fermanagh Alternative Education Project

A total of 17 key stage (KS) 4 pupils from six schools were selected to participate in the project, which commenced in 2001/2002. The project involves pupils in a mixture of school and employment experience eg two days (or four half days) work and skills-based training at Fermanagh Training Ltd with the rest of the time is spent at school. Although to date

seven pupils have dropped out, early assessment of the project provides evidence of success for the majority of the pupils.

ii. **School Age Mothers Project**

This is an excellent development of a holistic programme for young mothers who have had to opt out of formal education. The funding was received from the Londonderry Regeneration Initiative and is a good example of interagency collaboration. The project has been successful in re-engaging these young people with education. The results show that two year 11 pupils completed three GCSE courses while five year 12 pupils all completed four GCSEs.

iii. **Institute of Inclusive Learning**

This was a good example of an effective alternative education programme to help with the education and preparation for employment of disaffected and marginalized KS4 pupils from all participating schools within the Londonderry area.

iv. **Multi-Agency Support Team (MAST)**

A meeting attended by a member of the survey team indicated that the key agencies responsible for the education or well-being of children were represented including representatives of the Behaviour Support Team, the school principal, the special educational needs co-ordinator, the educational psychologist and the EWO. The meeting was useful and productive. The EWO clearly knew the pupils, their social and educational background, the parental support or restraints, and her advice and recommendations contributed significantly to the decisions taken.

Other effective activities which were observed during the survey included:

- the School Group Conferencing-Pilot scheme;
- group work in schools on anti-bullying, attendance, behaviour, child protection;
- the Self-Improvement Project;
- the Self-Esteem Programme, Parent Support Group;
- the operation of circle time for primary schools;
- the contribution of anger management sessions;
- the support at INSET training for schools;
- the Improving School Attendance-Getting Ahead Through Education (GATE) project.

- 7.2 The majority of the sessions visited were of high quality and were successful in engaging parents, pupils and the schools in the creative and innovative approaches adopted. The intervention strategies employed varied and were effective in assisting all those involved to manage school attendance more effectively and to look more closely at the underlying social issues affecting attendance, behaviour and, in particular, the pupils' attitudes to schools. However, in a small number of cases, it was apparent that the EWOs involved in group work in schools, were insufficiently skilled in engaging pupils in the range of pastoral care issues involved and, in some cases, demonstrated a lack of awareness of the teaching techniques required. It was noted in these instances, that the EWOs undertook the programme of discussion and intervention with pupils without the presence of the class or form teacher thus creating difficulties for follow-up work within the school. It is important that the practice of group work in schools should be reviewed with regard both to the involvement of a relevant teacher and to the training needs of EWOs.

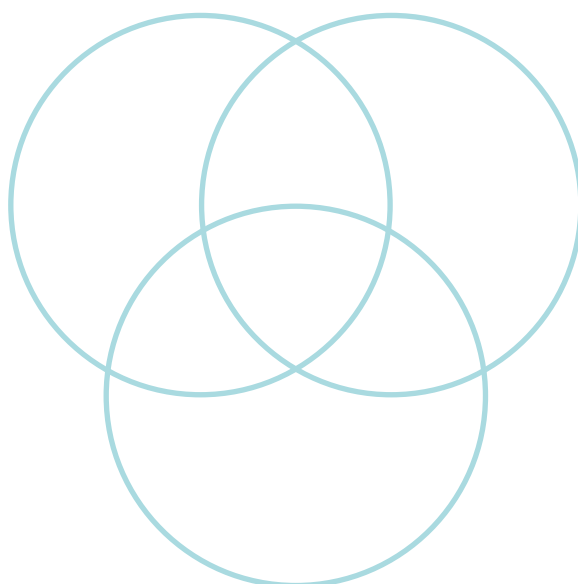
8. **Accommodation and Resources**

- 8.1 In general, the quality of accommodation provided in the area offices is good. Recent developments have included the development of a former principal's house in Limavady into EWS offices, the provision of excellent offices in Strabane and Enniskillen for the area teams, and centrally located offices in Londonderry. It is only in the WELB's HQ that the quality of office accommodation is poor.
- 8.2 Use of technology is improving, more laptops are being provided and the development of an integrated data-base is being considered.

9. **Conclusion**

- 9.1 The WELB's Educational Welfare Service has many strengths. The CEWO, whose commitment to high standards sets the tone for the service, is an effective leader. The high quality of the team-work observed, and the able leadership of the SEWOs, contribute to the creation of an ethos in which partnership with others is encouraged. A commitment to the core aims of improving attendance is demonstrated. The many positive features of the service include the high quality of individual work observed, the partnership arrangements with schools, the skill and expertise of staff in relating to parents and pupils, the sound inter-agency work which enhances the quality of the EWS, the wide variety of strategies employed to engage disaffected pupils, particularly at KS4, the increasing intervention at primary level and the commitment to staff development. A number of areas for improvement have been identified during the survey. These relate to further in-service training for officers working with groups of pupils in schools, more focused liaison with teachers in these schools to facilitate follow-up activities, the further development of ICT support and the development of arrangements for communication between staff and their base locations. There is ample evidence that the stated aims of the EWS in the WELB

are being reflected in practice and with further commitment to reviewing its work in light of its core business and to developing quality assurance measures and information systems, the EWS is well placed to meet the needs of its client group in the future.



The Western Education and Library Board (WELB) – The Role of The Education Welfare Service (EWS) in Relation to The Education of Looked After Children

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The term “looked after children” refers to children who are cared for by a HSS Trust either under the terms of a Care Order, or accommodated under a voluntary agreement between the parents, or others with parental responsibility, and a HSS Trust. Research in recent years has found that in terms of educational attainment, looked after children do less well than other children, even those from comparable social, economic and family backgrounds. The Health Committee Report, “Children Looked After by Local Authorities” (House of Commons 1998, London: The Stationery Office), noted (Para 46) that:
- between 50% and 75% of schools leavers who have been in care (care leavers) complete their schooling with no formal qualifications compared with only 6% of the general population;
 - between 12% and 19% of care leavers go on to further education compared with 68% of the general population;
 - between 50% and 80% of care leavers are unemployed;
 - one in ten 16-17 year old claimants of DSS severe hardship payments have been in care.
- 1.2 The poor educational achievement of looked after children has considerable implications for their future life changes and earning potential. The research findings have driven a range of initiatives in England to improve the educational outcomes of looked after children. Similarly, in Northern Ireland there is a growing interest in improving the educational outcomes of children who are looked after.
- 1.3 The area served by the WELB is co-terminous with the boundaries of the WHSSB. The total number of children looked after is known (500, on 31 March 2001). What is not known, however, is:
- the number of looked after children who are of compulsory school age;
 - the schools they attend;
 - the attendance level of looked after children;
 - their educational attainment, particularly in relation to their peers who are not looked after;

- the rate of suspensions and expulsions of looked after children and how these compare with their peers who are not looked after;
- the level of statementing of looked after children and how this compares with non-looked after peers.

1.4 In reaching its judgment, SSI took into account:

- discussion with the Chief Education Welfare Officer (CEWO);
- attendance at the second meeting of the looked after children sub-committee of the WHSSB's Children and Young People's Committee;
- the draft WELB/WHSSB Protocol on the education of looked after children;
- visit to an EOTAS project which provides for a number of looked after children;
- attendance at a meeting comprising the CEWO, the Head of Tuition Services, the EOTAS Co-ordinator and the Director of the Lifelong Learning Institute;
- a visit, in the company of an Education Welfare Officer (EWO), to a looked after child living in a children's home;
- discussion with EWOs and social services staff employed by Foyle and Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trusts.

2. The Findings

2.1 There is a clear awareness of the needs of looked after children and an interest in improving their educational opportunities and attainments. There is also a commitment to work in partnership with social services staff from both the Western Health and Social Services Board (WHSSB) and its two provider HSS Trusts (Foyle and Sperrin Lakeland). The CEWO is a member of the looked after children sub-committee of the WHSSB's Children and Young People's Committee. This sub-committee held its inaugural meeting on 14 February 2002, and is currently drafting a remit to guide its work. One of the issues it has decided to address is the education of looked after children.

2.2 Currently, there are no arrangements in place to ensure that either the CEWO or the WELB is notified when a child becomes, or ceases to be, looked after. There is a need for better communication of information across the education and social services sectors to ensure that relevant EWS personnel know about children who are looked after. Information exchange would enable the EWS either to provide additional supports to a school with a high enrolment of looked after children or to supply additional support to maintain looked after children within school settings.

- 2.3 According to EWS staff, there is a tendency for schools (particularly in the primary sector) either to delay referral of children to the EWS, or to limit referrals to children with attendance-based problems. EWOs recognise that earlier intervention has greater prospect of success as it prevents problems of attendance or behaviour becoming entrenched. Earlier identification of children with school-based difficulties would enable the EWS to make appropriate referrals to HSS Trusts and could reduce the need for children to become looked after in the future. The CEWO advises, however, that the current staffing level limits the opportunity for preventative working.
- 2.4 The need for an effective interface between the WELB and the WHSSB has resulted in the WELB commissioning a member of staff to work with social services and EWS colleagues on identifying the schools which looked after children attend, as the precursor to undertaking an audit of their educational needs, and drafting a WELB/WHSSB protocol on the education of looked after children. Consultation is currently underway on the draft protocol. The protocol will clarify the respective roles of those working with looked after children. The preliminary work has identified that in the Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trust some 83 looked after children attend school. The schools attended by these children have also been identified. The EWS has an involvement with 23 of these children. A similar audit is currently ongoing in Foyle HSS Trust.
- 2.5 The absence of baseline information on looked after children means that the EWS is unable to quantify the level of suspensions and expulsions and to ascertain how this compares either within a specific school or across the WELB's area. It also reduces the opportunities to target support on schools with a high enrolment of looked after children aimed at increasing staff's awareness of their specific needs.
- 2.6 Looked after children live in a range of placements such as with their family under the terms of a Care Order, or with foster carers, or in children's homes. EWOs report that much of their work is focused on the last of these groups of children who present considerable challenges in terms of their engagement/re-engagement with education services. The difficulty in re-integrating these children into school or engaging them with alternative education provision is considerable and suggests that greater focus needs to be placed on preventing these children being suspended or expelled from school. Common difficulties include the refusal of children to engage with any form of educational intervention and also problems finding a school willing to offer a place to a looked after child who is out of school. A clear distinction was made between the needs of children in residential care as opposed to those living with foster carers. A range of respondents noted that the presence of a designated person, such as a foster carer, with whom they could liaise regarding a child's educational needs yielded a more focused approach and better outcomes for the children.

- 2.7 EWOs are attached to a number of schools rather than allocated work designed to meet the needs of a specific group of children, such as looked after children. When, however, a child has been expelled from school, the EWO maintains responsibility for him/her until a new school has been found. This practice is commended as it ensures that there is a named EWO with responsibility for the child. The need for early engagement of the EWO to reduce the likelihood of a child being suspended or expelled requires both that schools are aware of the looked after status of children and that teachers have access to support and services aimed at maintaining the school placement. Currently, there is no EWO designated to cover residential children's units to provide a consistent link between these facilities and schools.
- 2.8 The population of looked after children is small and is spread across a number of schools. Preliminary work on identifying the schools attended by looked after children in Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trust suggests that some schools have no children from the looked after population while others may have a maximum of six. The low number of looked after children in individual schools, has implications for both the EWO and the schools in terms of their capacity to develop specific approaches to working with these children.
- 2.9 Within social services there was a perception that the EWOs generally regarded their role as ended once a child became looked after, unless at that time there was a specific difficulty relating to school. Conversely, EWOs reported that they welcomed the opportunity to be involved with children following their admission to care. EWOs stated that there was an inconsistency in their being invited by social services to attend review meetings of looked after children. EWOs noted that when they were invited to these meetings they found attendance helpful both in terms of sharing information and in gaining a better understanding of how best to work with the children regarding their attendance or behaviour in school. The draft WELB/WHSSB protocol, once finalised, should assist in improving the interface between social services and the EWS.
- 2.10 Within the WELB, there are no services that are targeted specifically on looked after children. Instead, these children access available services if they meet the criteria for admission into the programme. Anecdotally, looked after children are over-represented in terms of both their referral to and attendance at alternative education provision outside mainstream education. The absence, however, of a database on these children means that staff's perceptions in this area cannot be confirmed.
- 2.11 The WELB has recently advertised for an Assistant Advisory Officer. One of the duties of this post holder will be to raise awareness of the needs of looked after children. Given the specific training of EWOs and their knowledge of the reasons why children became looked after, there is an interface between this new post and the EWS, which needs to be taken into account to ensure clarity of role.

- 2.12 The EWS is well placed to negotiate between schools and social services and to raise awareness of the implications of the respective actions of either on the other. It is also in a position to ensure that staff from each sector are aware of the “jargon” or culture of one another. In the absence of appropriate arrangements, some children self-refer to social workers once they have been suspended from school. This is accepted at face value and the child begins the process of disengaging from school. The need for a common understanding and clear lines of communication indicates that the EWO can assist with developing effective links between schools and social services. This process would be further assisted if schools and children's homes also had a designated member of staff responsible for the education of looked after children.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

- 3.1 Educationally as a group, looked after children attain less well than their peers who are not looked after, while many of these children have no behavioural or attendance problems within school, some pose considerable challenges to teaching staff. It is essential that teachers are aware of and understand the needs of looked after children, so that they can be assisted to meet their potential within the school system. While there is currently no data to substantiate the view that looked after children are disproportionately represented among children attending EOTAS AEP provision, in receipt of tuition services, or suspended or expelled from school, this was the perception of many social services and EWS staff. The EWS is well placed to provide a link between social services and the education systems to the benefit of looked after children. There was evidence of a recognition within the EWS of the need to work with looked after children at an earlier stage than is currently possible to prevent their removal from school. There is also recognition of the need to work with schools to raise the awareness of staff of the needs of looked after children. There was clear evidence that the EWS was striving to develop a more professional role than it perceived others had of it, namely of being attendance officers.
- 3.2 The EWS has afforded priority to working with looked after children as demonstrated by the work which has commenced on identifying these children and the schools they attend as a first step in assessing their needs and in drafting a WELB/WHSSB protocol. Comments from social services colleagues indicate that there are generally good working relationships between EWOs and social services staff although at times there are frustrations because of the difficulties in providing education services for specific children.

To assist with developing further the EWS the following recommendations are made.

1. The CEWO should liaise with managers from Foyle and Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trusts to develop an information system that would ensure that the EWS is notified by the Trusts whenever a child begins, or ceases, to be

looked after. The information provided should include details relating to the school attended and any issues relating to the child's educational needs which could inform the work which the EWS provides to facilitate the child's ongoing education.

2. The CEWO should ensure that the final WELB/WHSSB protocol addresses the issue of EWOs' attendance at review meetings for looked after children to ensure that there is a consistent approach to their involvement in planning meetings.
3. The CEWO should consider appointing a designated EWO for looked after children, particularly for those living in children's homes.
4. The staffing level within the EWS should be reviewed by the WELB to ensure that there are adequate resources to work preventatively with looked after children to reduce the potential for them to be suspended or expelled from school.
5. The CEWO should develop approaches to increase awareness of the role of the EWO within schools and social services, particularly in relation to their work with looked after children.
6. The CEWO should ensure that there is clarity regarding the distinctive roles of the EWS and the Assistant Advisory Officer in relation to working with looked after children, in order to avoid confusion or duplication.
7. The CEWO should collate information on an annual basis to assess if looked after children are disproportionately represented in the following areas:
 - referrals to, or attendance at, alternative educational programmes;
 - suspensions or expulsions from school.

This information should be used for planning purposes and to develop the work which the EWS provides to these children. In turn this should further strengthen the partnership approaches between EWS and social services targeted specifically on meeting the educational needs of looked after children.